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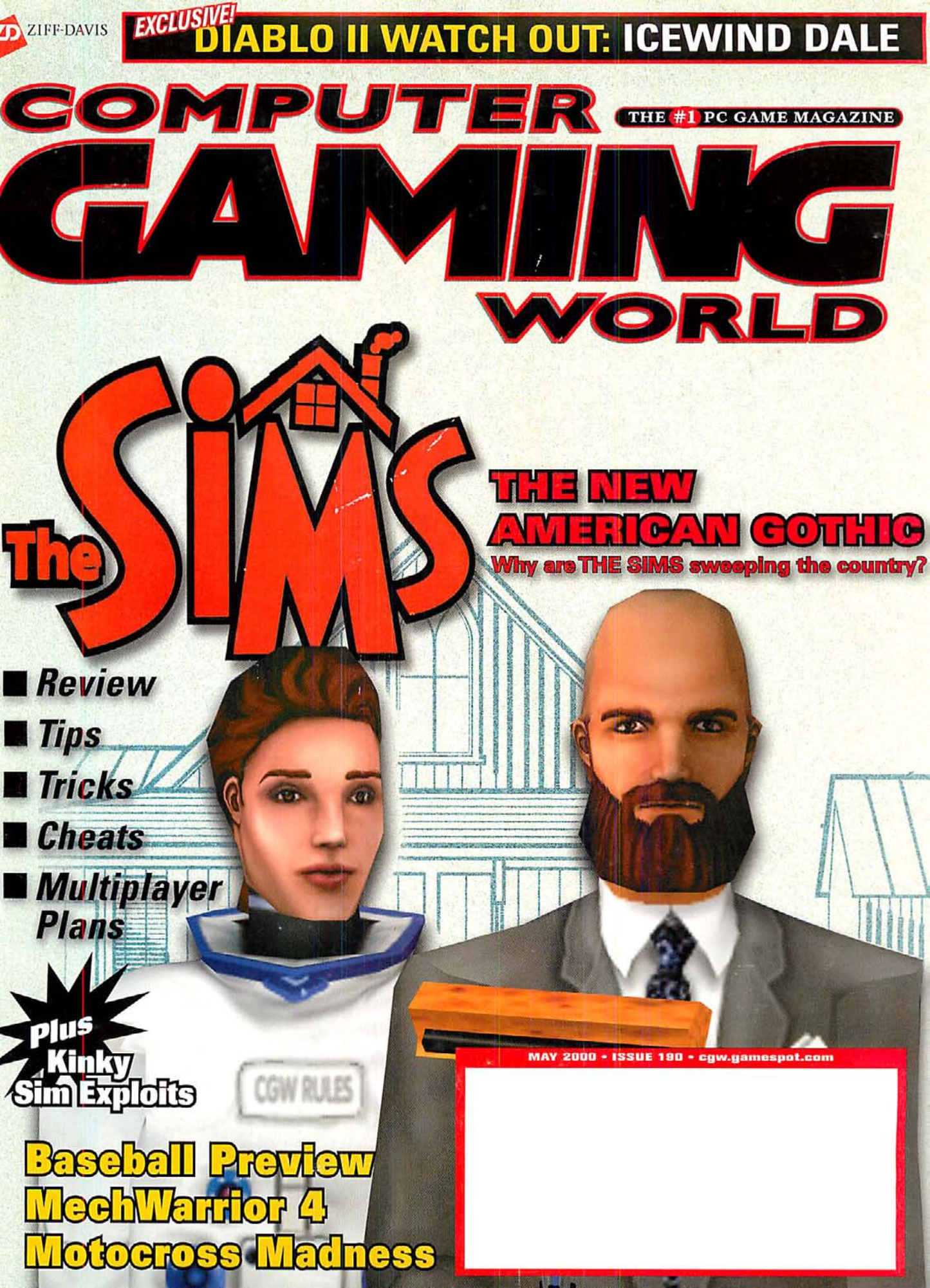
The SIMS

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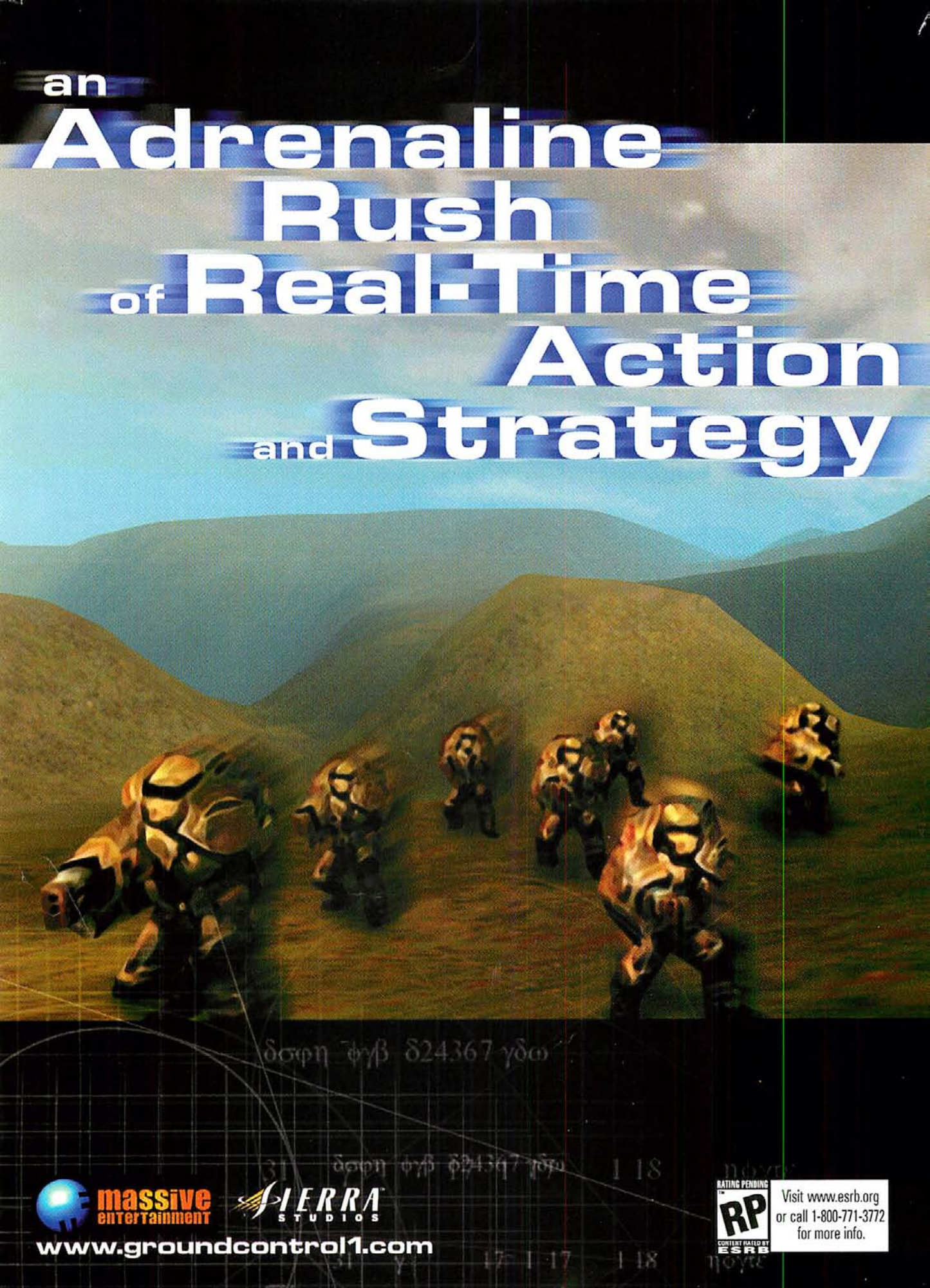
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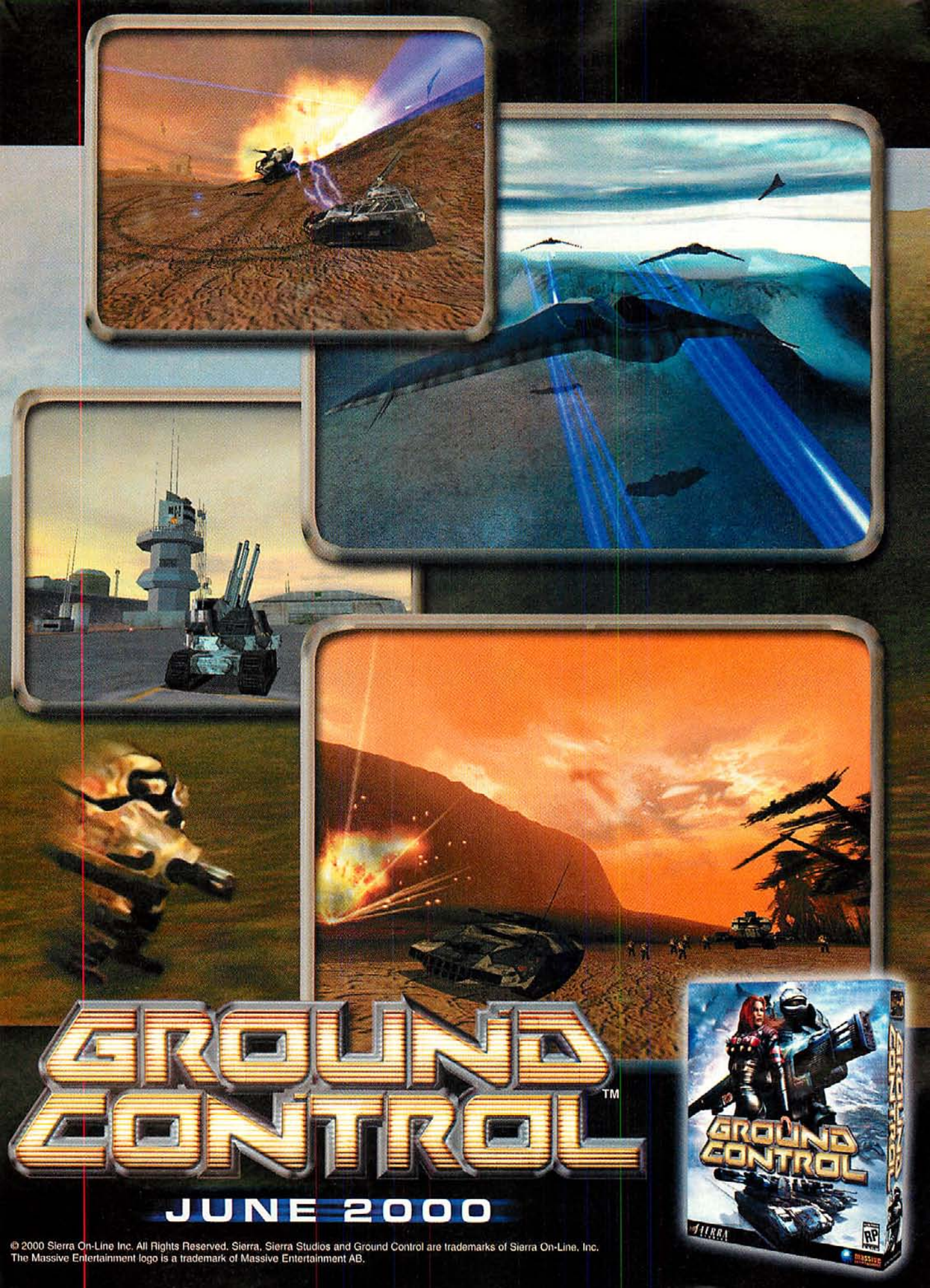
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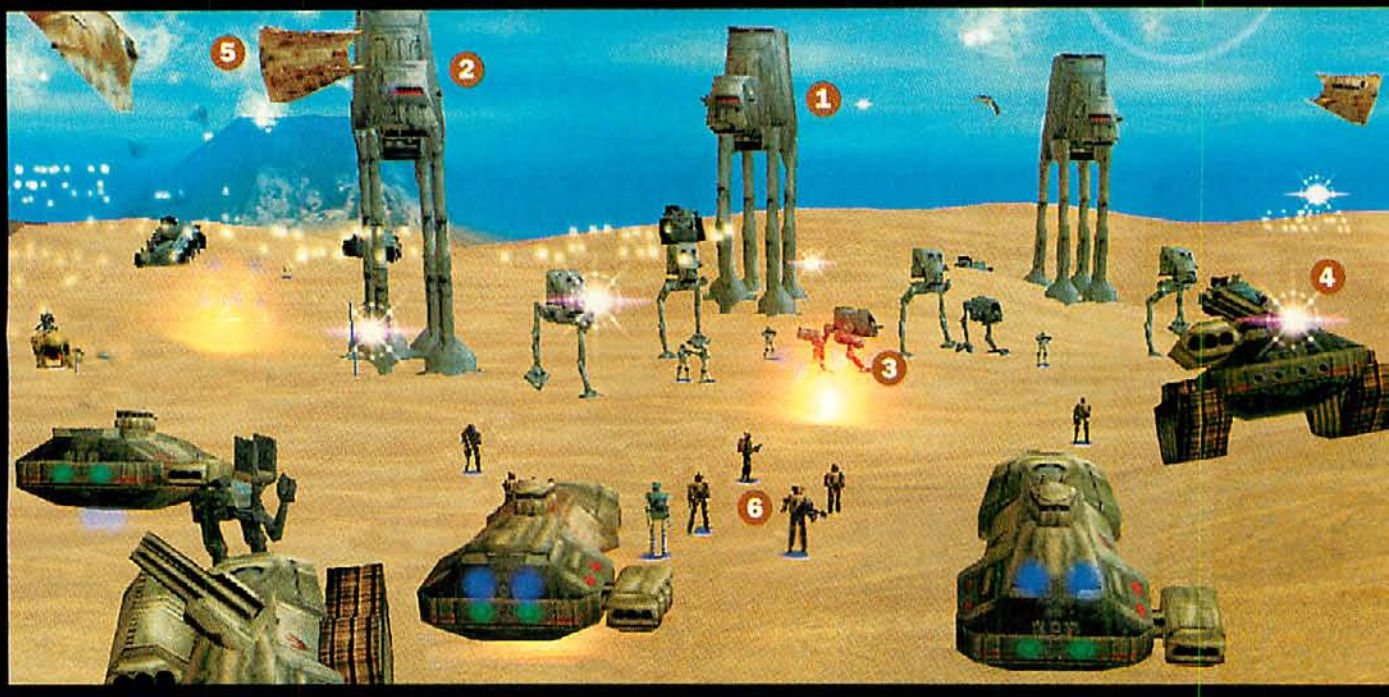
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2



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3



Sergeant Krung

Served: Battle of Hoth, Battle of Abridon, Battle of Coruscant, Battle of Endor, Battle of Tatooine (missing in action).

4



Sergeant Major Corillon

Served: Battle of Yavin (wounded), Battle of Sarapin (wounded), Battle of Coruscant, Battle of Endor, Battle of Tatooine (killed).

5



Lieutenant Major Antilles

Served: Battle of Yavin, Battle of Sarapin, Battle of Ruul (wounded), Battle of Coruscant, Battle of Endor, Battle of Tatooine (wounded).

6



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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

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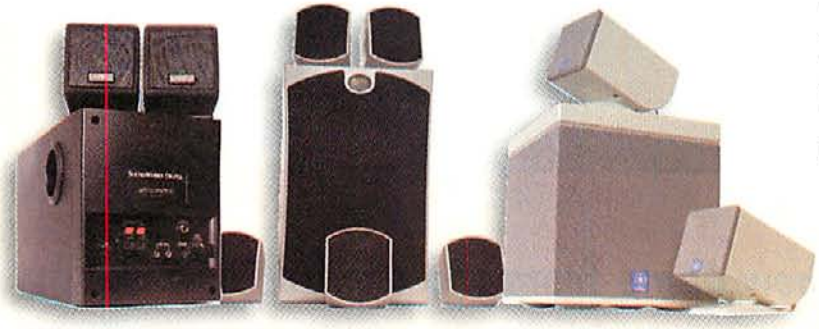
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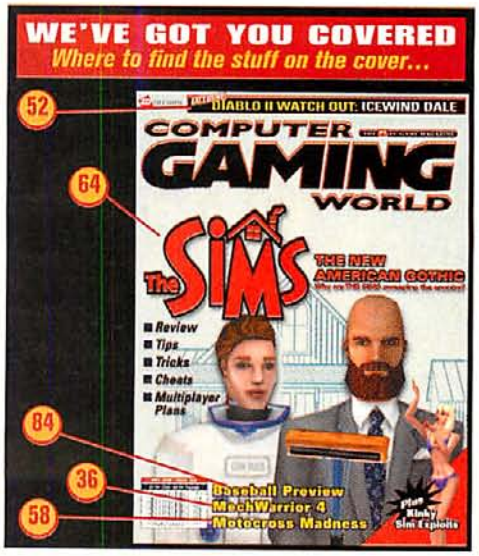
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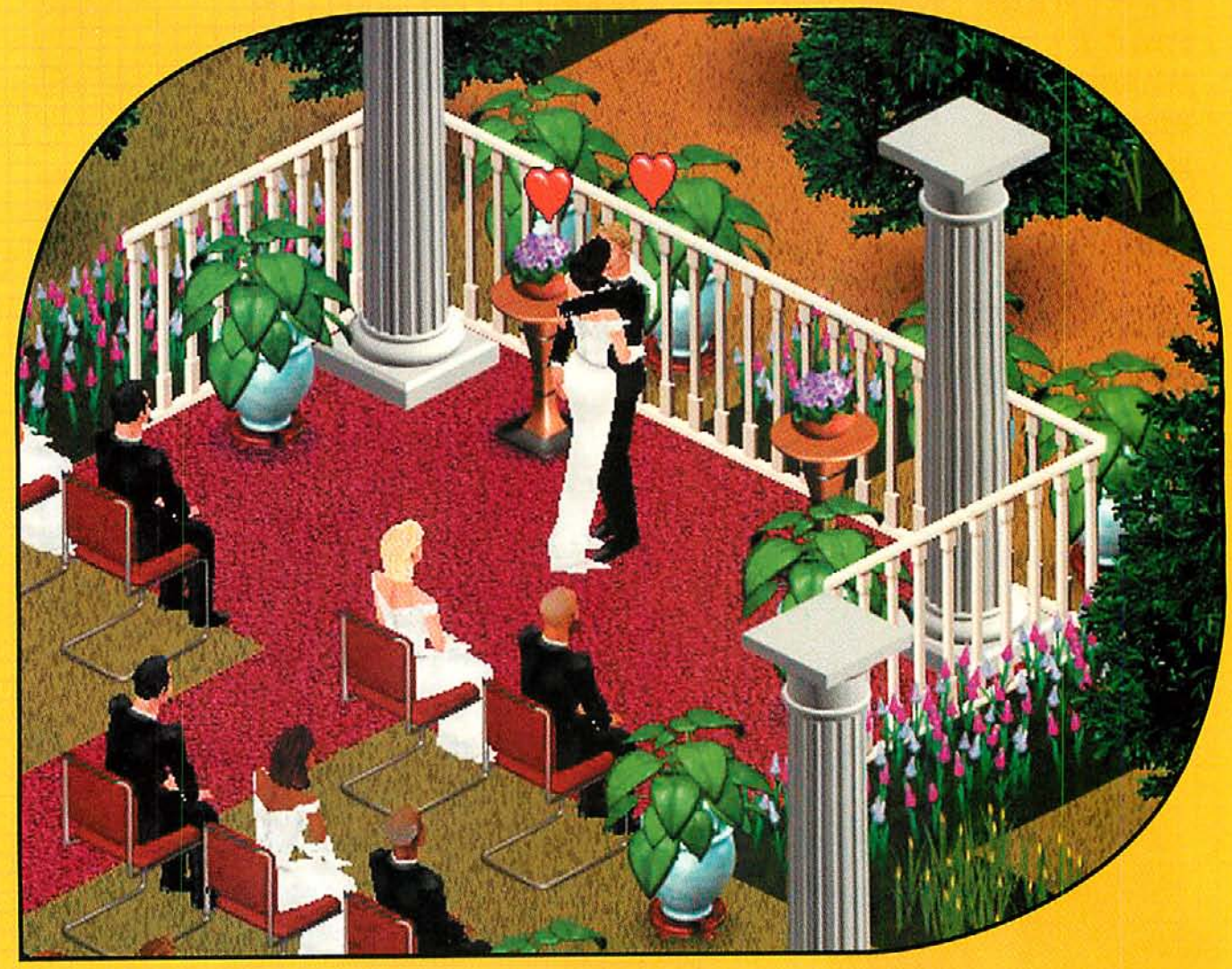
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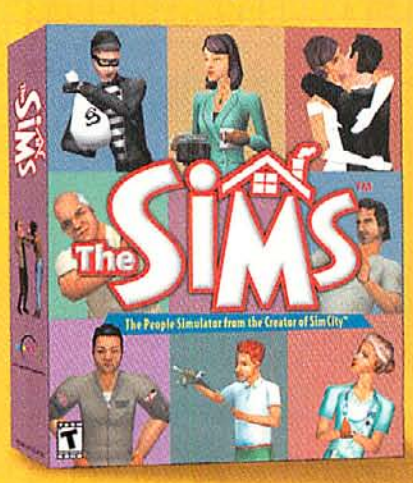
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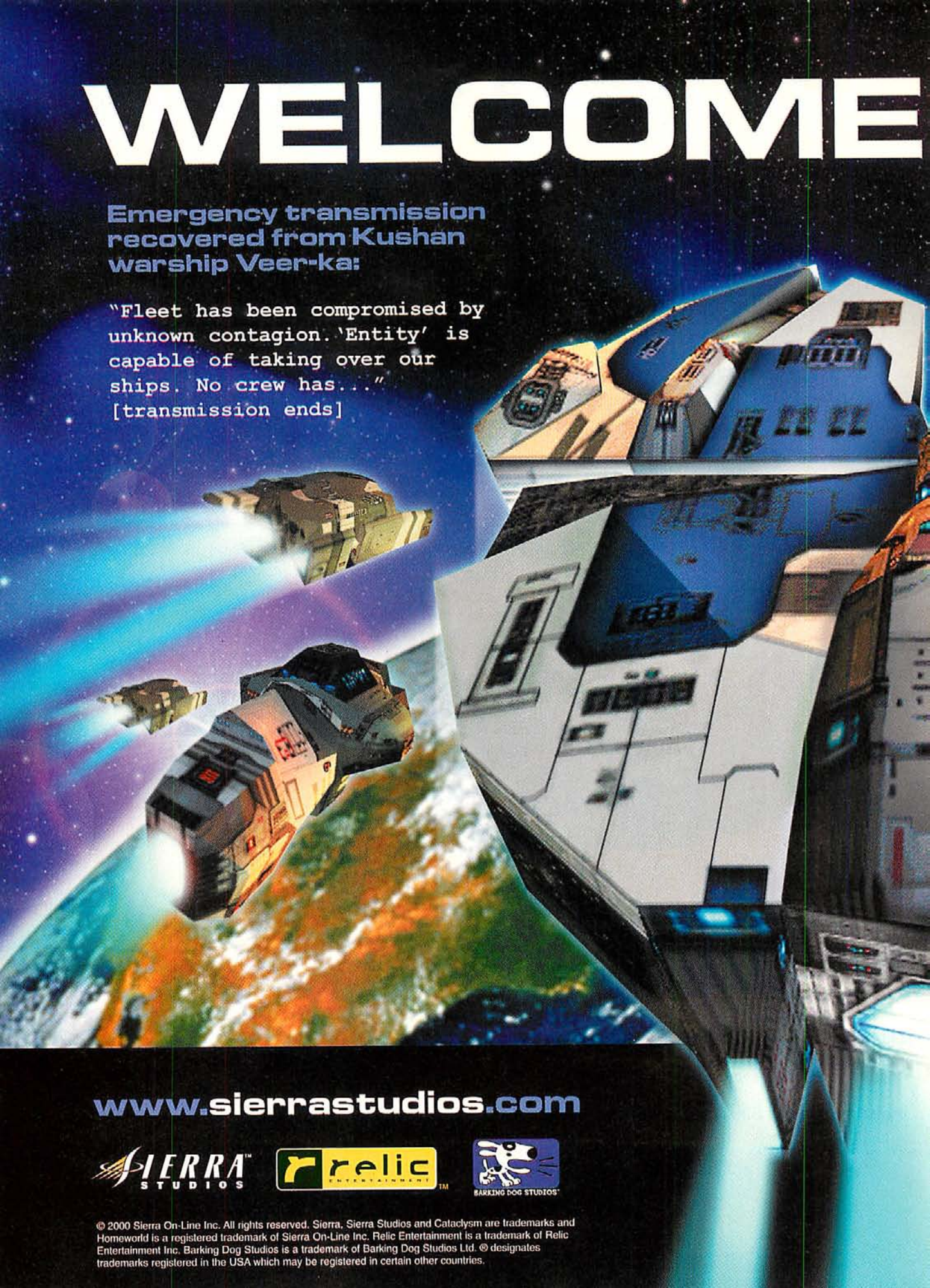


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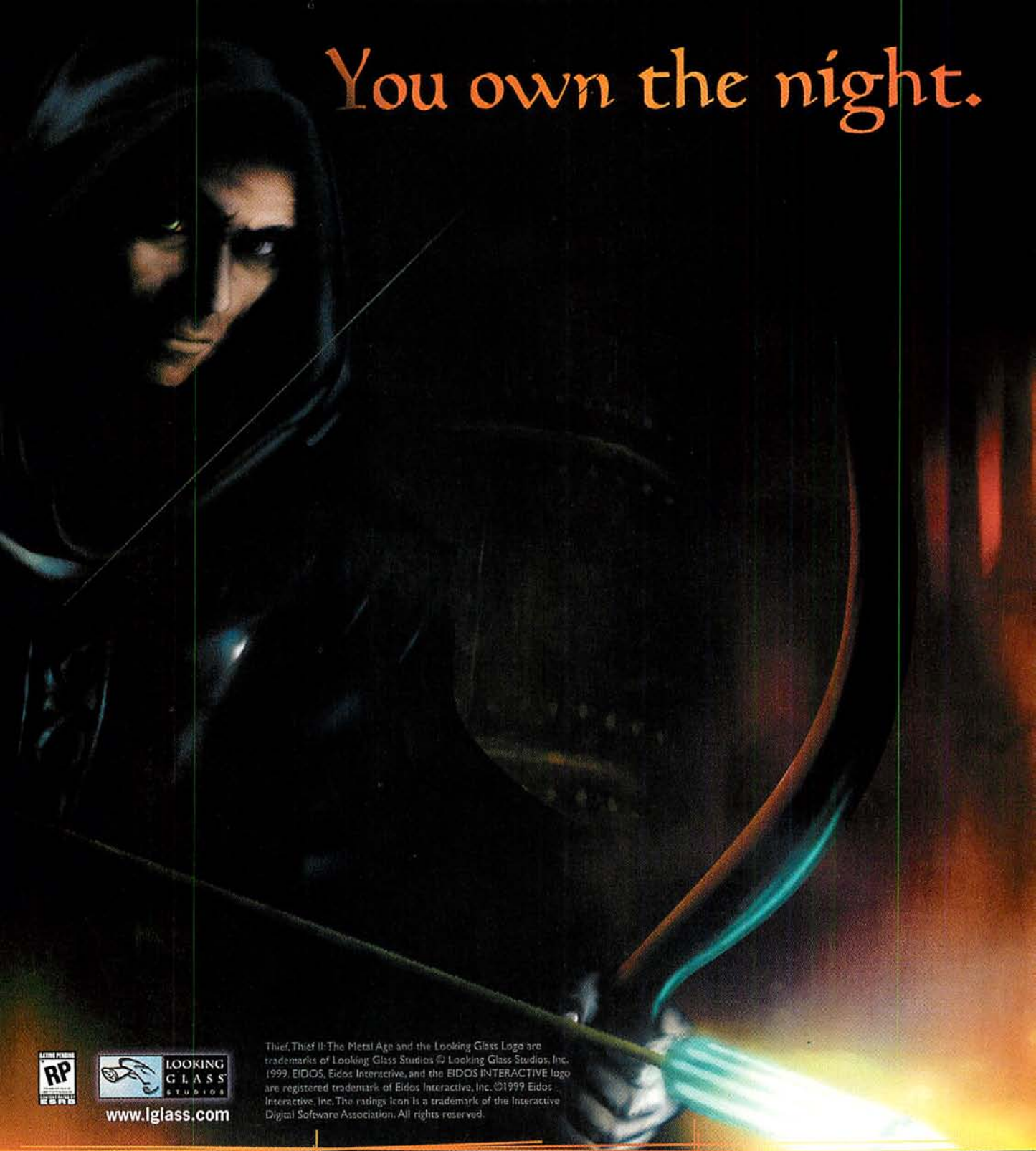
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FALL 2000

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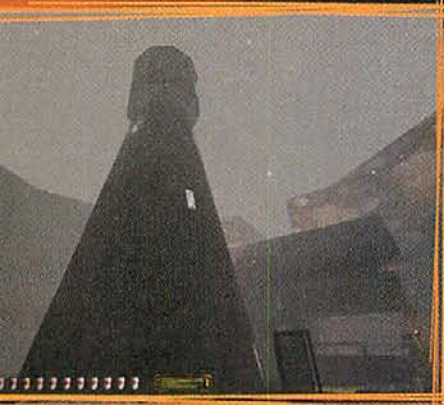
You own the night.

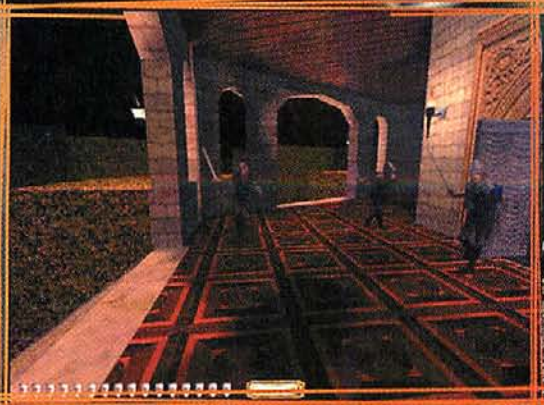


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ISSUE 190
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PUBLISHER
LEE UNIACKE • lee_uniacke@zd.com

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
GEORGE JONES • george_jones@zd.com
EDITOR
KEN BROWN • ken_brown@zd.com
MANAGING EDITOR
CHRIS LOMBARDI • chris_lombardi@zd.com
TECHNICAL DIRECTOR
DAVE SALVATOR (HARDWARE, SIMULATIONS) • dave_salvator@zd.com
SENIOR EDITOR
JEFF GREEN (ADVENTURE, RPG, NEWS) • jeff_green@zd.com
ASSOCIATE EDITOR
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ASSISTANT EDITORS
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TOM PRICE (SPORTS) • tom_price@zd.com
COPY EDITOR
HOLLY FLEMING • holly_fleming@zd.com
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
CHARLES ARDAI, MARK ASHER, GORDON BERG, LOYD CASE

ART DEPARTMENT
ART DIRECTOR
STEVE WANCZYK • steve_wanczyk@zd.com
GRAPHIC ARTIST
JASON "MISSING LINK" BABLER • jason_babler@zd.com

PRODUCTION DEPARTMENT
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR
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ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER
SUZANNE REIDER • suzie@zd.com • (415) 357-4915
REGIONAL SALES MANAGER/ SAN FRANCISCO, SOUTHERN TERRITORY
MARCI YAMAGUCHI • marciy@zd.com • (415) 357-4944
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DRU MONTGOMERY • dru_montgomery@zd.com • 415) 357-4925
ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE/ SILICON VALLEY, NORTHERN TERRITORY
JOANN CASEY • joann_casey@zd.com • (415) 357-4920
SENIOR MARKETING MANAGER
REY LEDDA • rey_ledda@zd.com • (415) 547-8775
MARKETING COORDINATOR
ANNIE LIPSCOMB • annie_lipscomb@zd.com • (415) 547-8248
RESEARCH MANAGER
MAY TONG • may_tong@zd.com • (415) 357-5430
ADVERTISING COORDINATOR
TIPLER UBBELOHDE • tipler_ubbelohde@zd.com • (415) 357-4930
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FOUNDER
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No-Brainer

Every now and then, we witness a gaming phenomenon so profound and transcendent, we know we have to put it on the cover of Computer Gaming World.

The fact that THE SIMS is one such phenomenon became startlingly obvious to me the other night. I couldn't sleep, so I figured I'd just "check in" on the fledgling alter-ego residing in my notebook. Right.

Seven hours later, the sun came up. I was still sitting at my computer. It was 6:00 in the morning. I couldn't straighten my mouse finger, and there was a permanent indentation at the tip. And I had that funky, slightly depressed and hungover feeling I get whenever I expose myself to such a massive dose of computer entertainment.



Thank god. It's been ages since I've gotten extreme game-lock on a single-player game. And man, did THE SIMS run me through the emotional gauntlet. In the course of seven hours, I felt:

Terrified. When a tragic BBQ accident claimed the lives of Jorgita Jones and dinner guest Bella Goth.

Weirded out. When Jorge Jones, Jorgita's long-lost brother, arrived in the neighborhood and quickly became a squatter in Jorgita's old haunt. Visitors cried mournfully beside the deceased's gravestones.

Scared. The ghost of Jorgita haunted her old home in the middle

"It's been ages since I've gotten extreme game-lock on a single-player game. And man, did THE SIMS run me through the emotional gauntlet."

of a dance party, freaking out Jorge and some of his guests.

Guilty. When, unbeknownst to Mortimer Goth, Jorge made the moves on his wife Bella. (Don't act like you didn't do the same thing!)

Pissed off. Jorge simply refused to go to work two days in a row, and lost his high-paying job as an Inventor. He got it back eventually.

Manipulative. Befriending people just to move up the corporate ladder doesn't feel good.

Indecisive. With three women and a guy vying for Jorge's attention, he needed to make a decision regarding a housemate. (Eventually, he chose Chris Roomie.)

Greedy. Did Jorge *really* need the hot tub, mini-bar, and plasma screen TV?

Shocked. One day at work, Jorge drank some kind of strange concoction and turned into a criminal. Talk about mid-life crises.

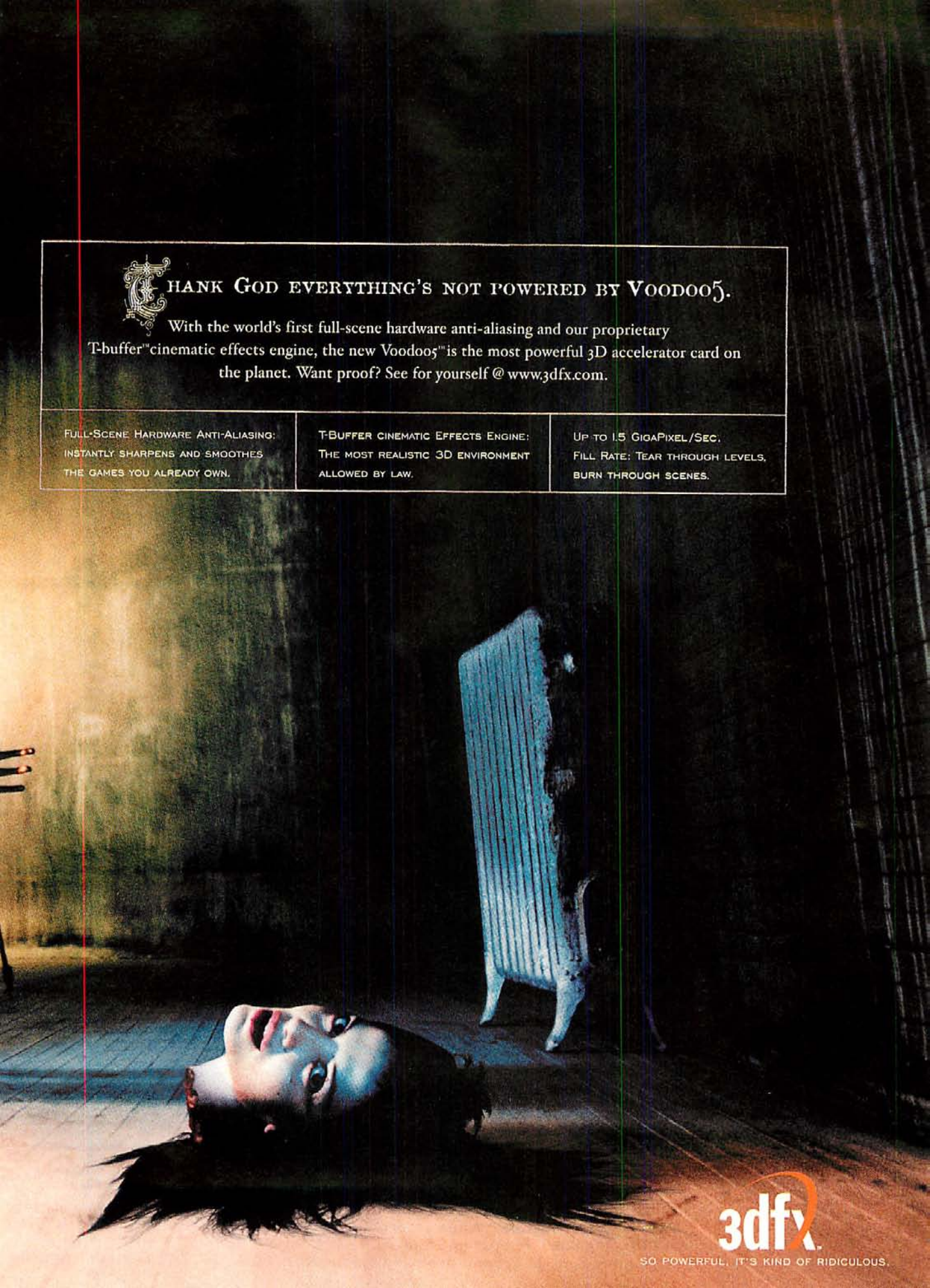
Excited. Gamers haven't seen an open-ended, emotionally-laden game like THE SIMS in a great while.

Thank you, Maxis. THE SIMS couldn't have come at a better time.

George Jones



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LETTERS

HOMEWORLD Expansion



I just finished reading the April issue of your magazine and the article on HOMEWORLD CATACLYSM. I don't mean to sound negative here, but all of the improvements and everything won't mean squat to me unless they somehow allow a person to adjust the difficulty level in the campaign more.

Jay

Powerplay—Whazzuuuuup?

Can you guys give me some help finding information about PowerPlay, which you wrote about in the March 2000 issue? I am intrigued by this technology but I can't find any more information on the Internet about it.

Thomas Routt

Powerplay is still in its infancy, so there's not a whole lot of information out there about this promising solution to latency and lag time. There is an official Web site however, at ***www.powerplayinfo.com****. Check it for updates, and sign up for the mailing list.*

Disturbing Trends

Having just read your review of REVENANT in the February 2000 issue, I noticed a minor mistake that seems to echo a growing trend in the game industry. The relevant quote is, "Rather than opting for the 'click on your enemy until he dies' method of combat, Eidos implemented a combat-control system that more closely resembles a console game than most PC dungeon romps."

Excuse me. Eidos implemented? No, *Cinematix Studios* implemented that combat system. The most Eidos ever had to say about REVENANT during its creation was, "Hmmmm, do you think you could make it more like Mario 64?" Eidos, like most publishers, is just a big company who gives money to developers to create games.

I could continue to rant, but there is an article online that addresses this question in much greater detail than I can enter into here. The URL for this article is: ***/www.gamezero.com/team0/articles/features/future_gaming_2000/part_1_page_1.html.***

You, as the game media, can directly affect this problem by focusing more on the talent that produces these games than the money behind them.

Adam Wiggins
Ex-Cinematix Studios employee

CGW Awards Redux

For years I have been reading *CGW*, and generally find your viewpoint clear and logical. Even when I don't agree with you, I can at least see where you arrived at your conclusions. In your choice for RPG Of The Year, however (March, 2000), you left me open-mouthed and in shock at your blatant brush-off of what was undoubtedly the most influential and perhaps the best overall game of this past year. Of course, I speak of the massively online RPG, EVERQUEST!!

Murray Allinger

UNREAL TOURNAMENT was a good game (great to some). In my opinion, it was nowhere near the quality of PLANESCAPE: TORMENT. I am the type of person who prefers a well-written story over flashy graphics and multiplay. These things are good, don't get me wrong, but given the choice between graphics and story, give me story any day of the week. How I mourn the passing of the adventure game.

Stephen Lerch

It Tastes Like Burning

I have an idea for a piece of gaming hardware that would intensify the thrills of playing first-person shooters. Currently, it is of small consequence to catch a rocket in the teeth as all one needs to do is hit your trigger to reenter the fray. Imagine for a minute that as you recklessly storm into battle to slaughter your opponents, you experience actual fear. Instead of force-feedback controllers or mice, how about a device that inflicts large quantities of PAIN?

Maybe an electric helmet that shocks the crap out of you, or maybe a force-feedback vest that upon sensing your death attempts to squeeze the life out of your chest. Make it costly to die. Make those snipers pay dearly for their actions. Give campers what they truly deserve. AGONY.

Now, I understand that hardware manufacturers will of course look at this and feel the liability isn't worth the return. But I say, slap some disclaimer stickers on the box and hook me up.

Mike Paulsen, aka Nightwatch

CGW Feel Good Dept.

I have been reading your magazine for two months and I must say, Gordon Berg (Inside Gaming, Simulations) is a HILARIOUS author (no, he didn't put me up to this). I find myself savoring the humorous remarks he makes in his overviews of flight sims. Despite not being a major flight-sim fan, I think his articles are full of promise and I believe he is worthy of professional praise.

Adam Turok

Ed: We're sure he didn't put you up to it, Gordon. I mean, "Adam."

Jeff Green, I just wanted to tell you (again) that your columns are funny and right on. Your wit and self-deprecating humor elevate the magazine. However, I don't like the final comments that the editor always sticks in to poke fun at you...you deserve more respect.

David

Ed: No he doesn't.

Reader Tips

This is my favorite controller configuration for any FPS game, deathmatch or single-player. For the mouse, have Mouselook enabled (of course!), primary fire for mouse button one, and secondary fire for mouse button two. For the keyboard, use S to move forward; X to move backwards; Z to turn left; C to turn right; A to strafe left; D to strafe right; and Q, W, and E for any special commands that are necessary.

The advantage of having a turn-left and turn-right button is to prevent having to turn the mouse around so far that you almost break your wrist every time you are back-attacked. I am doing much better using this combination than I ever have in an FPS before.

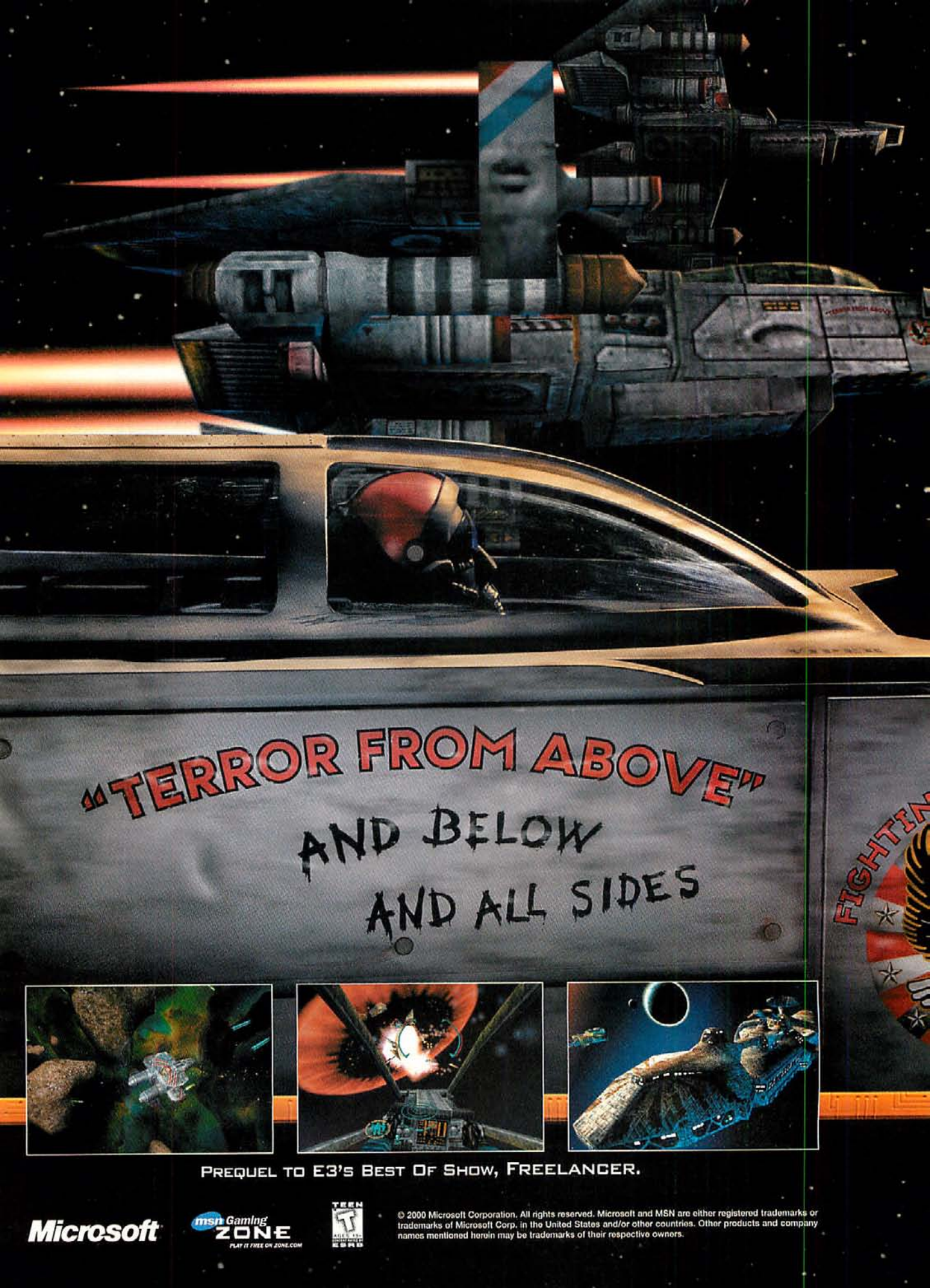
Adam Bosen

I don't know really if this constitutes a hint, but in **PLANESCAPE**, you probably know who Pharod is. During the conversation with his daughter, you will discover that Pharod has a horde of wealth stashed away somewhere. To get there, you just need to go back to his court after his death by the shadows, and retrieve his staff. Moving left, you'll come upon an arc which is in reality a portal. Touch the crutch to the arc and you will be teleported to Pharod's Vault. Search among the bookshelves for some goodies.

Secondly, to get a really cool hammer at the beginning of the game, just go to the Alley of Dangerous Angles. Go to the ruined cathedral and talk to the priest. Let him persuade you to join his cause. Then exit to any place after that in the Hive. You will be transported to the Player's Maze. Proceed to the left side of the maze where you will find one of your journals and a weapon, the Brimstone Hammer. To exit, counting the portals from the top right-hand corner, enter the third portal, and then WALK back all the way to the third portal and enter it again.

Mike Ax

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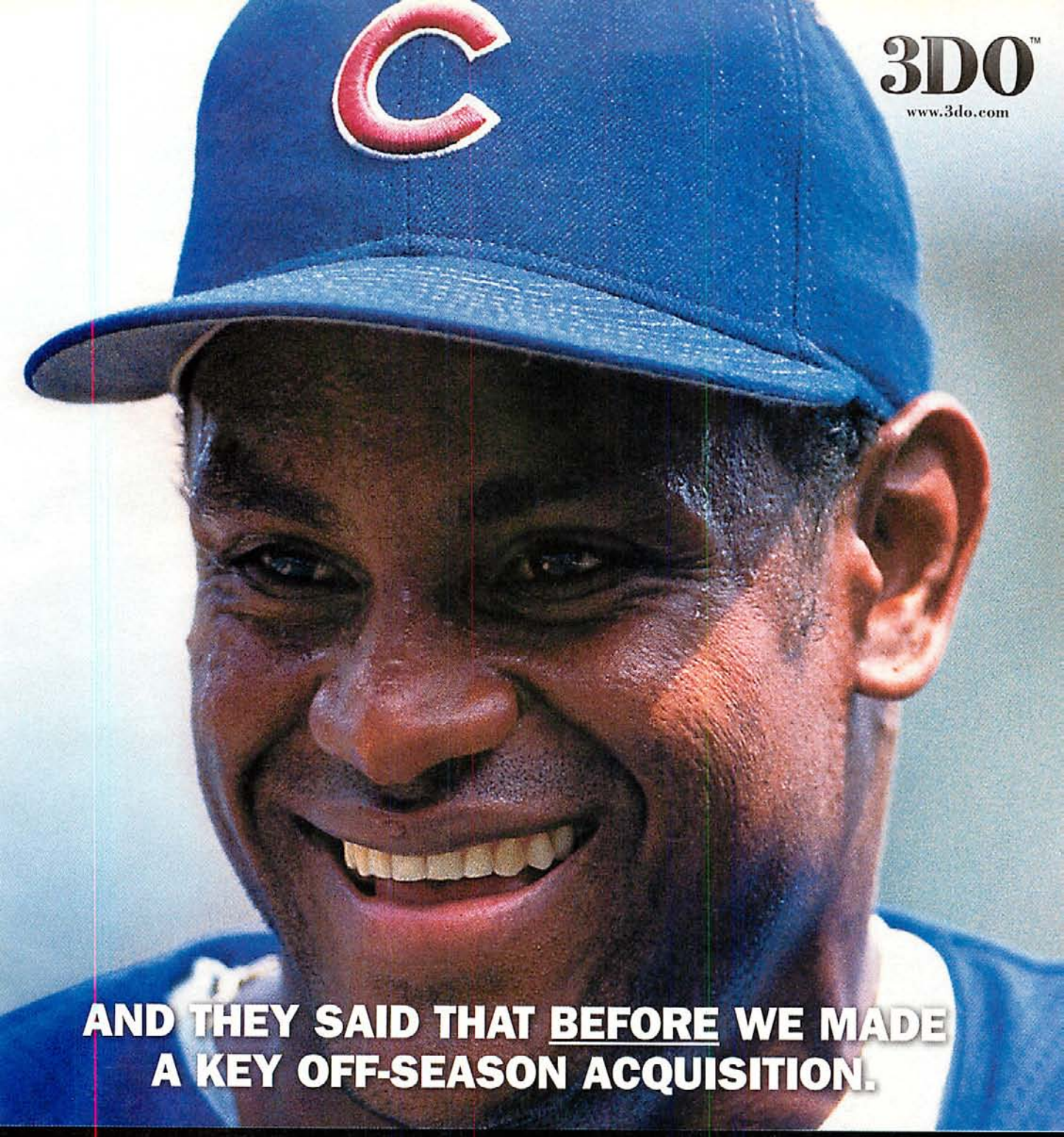






BONUS STRATEGY GUIDE INSIDE EVERY GAME

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The Latest News From Around the Computer Gaming World edited by jeff_green@zd.com





MECHWARRIOR 4
PRE-ALPHA SCREENSHOT

MECHWARRIOR 4 FASA's next game in its much-beloved BATTLETECH universe knocked the gaming press over with slick graphics and the promise of a deep, dramatic narrative.



Microsoft Rolls Out Big Titles, Big Designers at Annual Editor's Day

Big Guns at Gamestock 2000

You have to hand it to Bill Gates and company. The mega-corporation that used to be a bit of a joke amongst gamers is now a major force to be reckoned with, with all-star designers on the payroll and a number of grade-A, major-league titles on the slate. What's more, Microsoft's annual Gamestock event—the official rollout party for its yearly lineup of games—has become one of the premiere gaming events of the year. This year's edition showed Microsoft having a scarily strong roster of new games.

Leading the pack, at least in terms of sheer wow-power, was MECHWARRIOR 4—being developed by Jordan Weisman and FASA Interactive. MECH 4 stunned Gamestock attendees, not just for the cool visuals, but for the promise of a strong mission-based storyline as well as a focus on character and narrative that has always been central to the franchise's enduring popularity. The game will feature 21 different Mechs—including six that have never been seen before—and a robust set of multiplayer options, including the ability to create customized missions, host your own servers, and play cooperative missions.





DUNGEON SIEGE Chris "TOTAL ANNIHILATION" Taylor's DUNGEON SIEGE may be the first DIABLO-killer to actually have a chance against Blizzard's RPG behemoth.

FASA Interactive also grabbed the Gamestock spotlight with CRIMSON SKIES, the action-oriented air combat game featured on the cover of our March issue. Those lucky enough to actually sit down

and play the early version of the game Microsoft had running emerged incredibly excited about this title, which has a unique, tongue-in-cheek storyline set in an alternate-reality 1930's America. The game's flight model is incredibly user-friendly and will likely appeal to a broad range of gamers—not just sim-heads.

Chris Taylor, the mastermind behind TOTAL ANNIHILATION, showed off his new 3D action/RPG

COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2 The second combat-based game in Microsoft's sim series takes place in the WWII Pacific Theater.



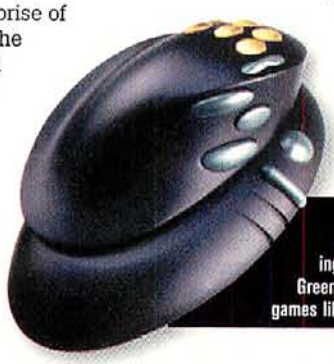
MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2 Microsoft's outrageous, popular motocross game vaults into a new dimension with better graphics and richer gameplay, thanks to the addition of a much-needed career mode.



DUNGEON SIEGE. To the surprise of no one, it looked as cool as the outspoken designer has said it would. Boasting a continuously flowing world with no load time whatsoever between game environments, and an interesting blend of RPG and real-time strategy elements such as waypoints and formations, DUNGEON SIEGE—even at this early stage—looks like a real contender to challenge DIABLO II.

Microsoft trotted out two other gaming superstars to peddle their wares: Tony Zurovec (CRUSADER: NO REMORSE), who showed LOOSE CANNON, a futuristic auto-combat game previewed back in our November 1999 issue; and Chris Roberts (WING COMMANDER), who gave us a peek at his highly anticipated space epic STARLANCER. And in a surprise move, Microsoft brought Relic's Alex Garden—creator of HOMEWORLD—onstage and announced that

continued on page 43



SIDEWINDER STRATEGIC COMMANDER This odd-looking device may help losers like Jeff Green finally win at real-time strategy games like AGE OF EMPIRES 2.

Tchotchke of the Month

Tchotch·ke (choch'ke). Slang, from Yiddish: a cheap, showy trinket.



This issue's Tchotchke of the Month is a pair of fuzzy dice, and the only real surprise is that it took so long for this to happen. Fuzzy dice are kind of your all-purpose tchotchke, good for any product or any occasion. The occasion this time is the DIE HARD TRILOGY, PART 2 from Fox Interactive, which we know absolutely nothing about. Is this a computer game? Who cares! All we know is, these dice will look great hanging from the rear-view mirror of the *CGW* bus when we go on our traditional Saturday-night joyrides in search of booze, chicks, and UNREAL TOURNAMENT add-ons.

The GOOD...

THE SIMS MANIA

It's the number-one game in the country and it's likely to stay that way for a while. It also happens to be a great game—Maxis' best since the original SIMCITY. And just when we were starting to get a little blasé about it, the game took on a brand new life thanks to the tons of resources, stories, and tools sprouting up all over the Web. Start at www.thesims.com and go from there.



the BAD...

MORE DIABLO 2 DELAYS

Guess what—it's delayed again. Now they're saying August. Don't get us wrong here, though. We're not saying it's *bad* for Blizzard to take so long. We all know what it's going to mean in the long run: a better, more solid game. And we'll take that over a nightmare like ULTIMA IX any day. What is bad, is that we have to wait even longer to play it. DIABLO 2 looked great at last year's E3. Knowing that it is almost assuredly going to be worth the wait just makes the anticipation that much worse.



and the UGLY...

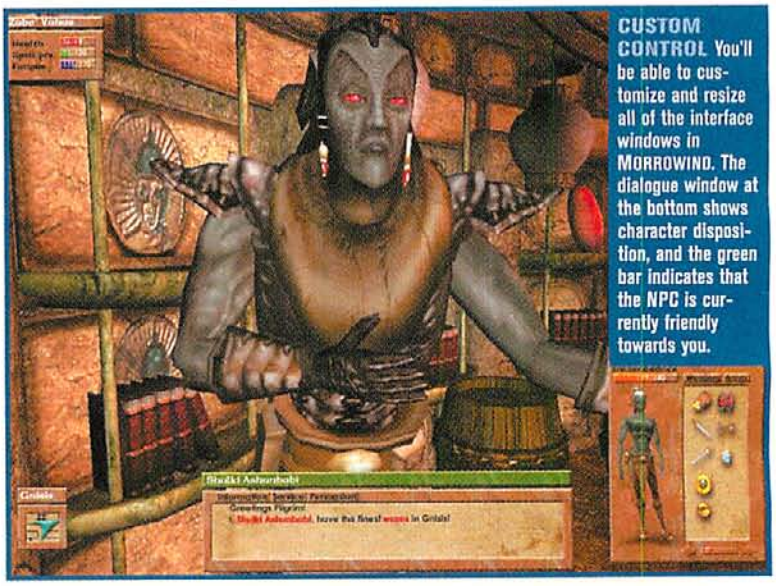
PANTY RAIDER

We are not prudes here at *CGW*—remember our Vampire cover? But the announcement of the "game" PANTY RAIDER from Simon & Schuster left us more embarrassed about this industry than ever. Let's see: You get to play as some kind of mouth-breathing moron, taking photos of supermodels in their underwear to satisfy the lustful urges of a group of teenage aliens. We are not making this up. Yes, yes, it's supposed to be "a joke." It's a "parody" of TOMB RAIDER-style games. Right. We're sure the game will be loaded with feminist subtext to drive that point home. Another depressing, useless piece of shovelware from the geniuses behind DEER AVENGER.



Morrowind Lives!

Bethesda Finally Announces Long-Awaited Sequel to DAGGERFALL



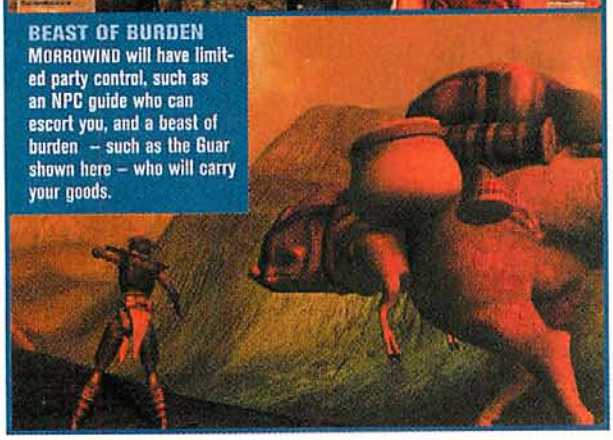
CUSTOM CONTROL You'll be able to customize and resize all of the interface windows in MORROWIND. The dialogue window at the bottom shows character disposition, and the green bar indicates that the NPC is currently friendly towards you.

Ever since Bethesda Softworks released its much-loved (for its gameplay) and much-loathed (for its bugs) DAGGERFALL way back in 1996, fans of the Elder Scrolls universe have clamored for a follow-up. The wait has been longer than expected, even for the company that took forever with DAGGERFALL. Bethesda's been so quiet, in fact, that many had wondered whether the company was actually open for business anymore. The answer, happily, is that they are still open, and they are a good full year into the development of the DAGGERFALL sequel, officially titled THE ELDER SCROLLS 3: MORROWIND. Although the game is not due until late 2001, Bethesda has at least made the announcement official, released some preliminary info and art, and launched a Web site (**www.elderscrolls.com**) for fans eager to follow the game's progress.

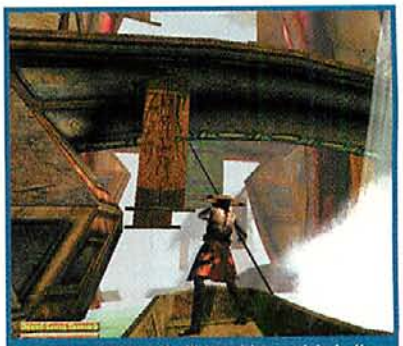
MODERN TECHNOLOGY MORROWIND will require full 3D acceleration, which will allow for much greater detail than in previous games. That floating rock thing in the background is a location you'll visit in the game.



BEAST OF BURDEN MORROWIND will have limited party control, such as an NPC guide who can escort you, and a beast of burden – such as the Guar shown here – who will carry your goods.



All we can tell you at this early date is that much of the same team that worked on DAGGERFALL is back on MORROWIND, and the company is promising the same kind of gigantic, open-ended, single-player RPG, with "hundreds of hours" of gameplay. The game will be in full 3D, and every single location will be individually handcrafted—no random dungeons this time. Bethesda said that the world itself will be more cohesive than in DAGGERFALL, but players will still have the complete freedom to explore at will, as in the earlier game. They've also promised that they've learned their lessons following the bugginess of DAGGERFALL, and are completely working out every single kink in one town first—gameplay, combat, spells, character interaction—before getting in over their heads with the rest of the world.



BOATACIOUS! You'll travel by gondola in the ancient Venice-style city of Vivec.

That's all we've got, and it's a ways off, but we'll have much more detailed, exclusive information in an upcoming *CGW*. THE ELDER SCROLLS: ARENA ran away with our RPG award in 1994, and THE ELDER SCROLLS 2: DAGGERFALL took it in 1996. Can Bethesda make it three in a row? The RPG field is more crowded than ever, but this is a series with a rich history and some hardcore, dedicated developers. Welcome back, MORROWIND. *–Jeff Green*

CGW PROFILE

Raven's Big Bird Talks About SOLDIER OF FORTUNE and More

Brian Raffel



1. Where did Raven get its name? Harbinger of death? Bird of dark wisdom? Traumatic experience with bird doo on a park bench?
When my brother and I first started Raven Software back in 89-90, we were heavily into *D&D*. Our first game was an RPG, so we wanted our company name to reflect us. We chose Raven Software because it was dark and medieval. Also, my father is a Raven.

2. What was it like to be assimilated by a giant company like Activision? Did you go from Schlitz to Heineken?
Well, before being assimilated we ate mainly cheese and drank sour buttermilk from the dairy farm next door, being from Wisconsin and all. Now we eat tofu, drink the best sparkling water, and I have a big urge to get a cell phone. The best thing about being part of Activision is that we have more resources to hire more quality talent. We are freed up from a lot of business responsibilities. I think if you look at HERETIC II, SOLDIER OF FORTUNE, and STAR TREK: ELITE FORCE you will see that we are doing our best work ever after becoming a part of Activision.

3. SOLDIER OF FORTUNE — is the violence and gore a bit of a touchy topic?
Only to the models in the game. Some of the terrorists, in particular, act up and get uppity, so we just make an example out of some of their buddies with our rocket launcher and they pipe down. We wanted this game to be more realistic than others in the past so that people get a gaming experience they have not quite had before. We also put in the ability to lock out all or parts of the gore, depending on what the player wants to do. The final touch is that the box is clearly marked "M" for mature and the gore lockout has a password protection.

4. You have three kids. How old will they have to be before they will be allowed to play SOF?
I took the SOF demo home to show my wife. She thought the game looked awesome but felt the violence would be too much for our kids, so I took it off the computer. I think SOF would be fine for my oldest when he is 18.

5. Favorite gaming memory?
I think one of my most favorite gaming memories would have to be when we were finishing up HERETIC and John Romero came to Raven to help us test. We had just gotten the Morph Ovum (turns other players into chickens) working and the first person I nailed with it was John. I give him credit. He was almost able to hide from me behind a barrel. When I finally got him, the chicken exploded into a pathetic mass of blood and feathers. When the last feather hit the ground, I knew I was changed forever.

6. You're also doing a Star Trek Voyager game. What do you say to people who say Star Trek Voyager sucks as a series?
I get my phaser and MAKE them love it.

7. Ever wonder if 6 of 9 is hotter than 7 of 9?
Actually I have wondered that. But when I do think about it, this soft music starts playing and both of them walk out and tell me that they must assimilate me. Then I say to myself, this is a good thing to wonder about.

—Interview by Mark Asher

Reality Check

If you're expecting consistency from the media, have a nice time in Beijing. The gaming press is all over the place, which is great because it gives us a chance to gloat. For starters, check out the ratings for QUAKE III. Nice id pom poms. But this month's widest spread comes courtesy of GABRIEL KNIGHT III. The most consistent ratings were for PLANESCAPE: TORMENT, and that should tell you something.

	CGW (out of five)	PC Gamer (out of 100%)	CGM (out of five)	PC Accelerator (out of 10)	Gamespot (out of 10)	Gamecenter (out of 10)
Age of Wonders	4	91%	4	8	8.6	8
Close Combat IV	4	84%	3.5	9	8.2	9
FIFA 2000	4.5	88%	4	*	9.1	8
Flight Simulator 2000	4	75%	4	*	8.7	6
Gabriel Knight III	2	80%	3.5	8	6.7	8
Omikron: The Nomad Soul	2	68%	3	7	6.0	8
Planescape: Torment	5	93%	4.5	9	9.0	8
Quake III Arena	3.5	80%	3.5	10	9.2	7
SWAT 3	4	88%	4	9	8.3	8
Tomb Raider: TLR	4	70%	4	5	7.3	7

*** indicates game has not been rated ● red = editor's choice game**

5, 10, 15 Years Ago in CGW

15



May 1985

In 1985, girls were girls and men were men, and just about everyone who owned a computer could program it, at least a little. So it was natural that game designers would create games out of programming. The most popular of these games took the form of robot battles. You designed a robot, programmed its limited AI, and then sent your robot off to battle against other robots. *CGW* reviewed two such games in our May 1985 issue, ROBOT ODYSSEY I and CHIPWITS, in addition to announcing the winners of a *CGW* sponsored ROBOTWAR Tournament. This month, the robot battles concept makes a return in MINDROVER. Check out the review on page 116.

10



May 1990

The past decade has been berry berry good for computer baseball game. If you compare our computer baseball roundup from 1990 (which featured STRAT-O-MATIC, LANCE HAFFNER, APBA and PURSUE THE PENNANT) with our roundup in this issue (page 84), you'll notice one very striking difference—graphics. If you wanted any sort of statistical verisimilitude in your computer baseball games ten years ago, you had to go the text simulation route. Thankfully, statistical modeling has finally caught up with graphics, resulting in games with great graphics and great statistics models like HIGH HEAT 2001.

5



May 1995

Our cover story was for a game that never really was: Domark's CONFIRMED KILL. This multiplayer online flight sim had huge promise, but Domark could never pull it all together. Fortunately, while the project died, the game's concept, promise, and programmers live on to beget a spate of new online flight sims, previewed this issue on page 80.


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The Latest Heaping Pile of Rumors, Innuendo, and Gossip

StealthMode

by A Flock Of Sneakies

Why did Brian Reynolds leave Firaxis to form Big Huge games? There may be $5 million reasons why, which is apparently the minimum Big Huge Games is asking for in their discussions with publishers. Reynolds is trying to go from 1 to 30-35 employees the fast way, which is why he needs the big bucks, and $5 million plus is his asking price to do a game.

While a warm and fuzzy Vulcan mind-meld might be enough for Kirk and Spock, **Activision** hoped to embrace something a bit more green-skinned when they shelled out the big bucks for the *Star Trek* license. HIDDEN EVIL's out and VOYAGER and ARMADA are on their way, but Activision isn't stopping there. By the time you read this, Activision will have announced another *Trek* game, this one called STAR TREK: CONQUEST ONLINE. It's a turn-based, online strategy game based on the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* universe. It's made by **Genetic Anomalies**—the people behind CHRON X—and features "collectible" pieces. In other words, expect to buy digital booster packs.

Brutal. When **Take 2** closed down an internal studio, **Gearhead Studios** (STAR CRUSADER, HELL, RIPPER, and BLACK DAHLIA on the PC, and BASSHUNTER 64 on the N64) came in, changed the locks, and told everyone to pack their stuff and leave—now! Employees got minimal severance pay (three weeks pay only, for those who'd been there four years). Artists weren't even allowed time to make copies of their art for their portfolios. What a bunch of sweethearts, eh? All Sneaky can say is, "Remember the Battlecruiser!"

Rumor is that not everyone at **Cavedog** was sorry to see the game company assimilated back into **Humongous**. Cavedog's success can be traced to **Chris Taylor**, who left to form **Gas-Powered Games** back in 1998. Since then, AMEN and ELYSIUM were cancelled and GOOD & EVIL is on indefinite hold. I'm hearing that some egos at Cavedog were a bit bruised, and that shifting the spotlight from Cavedog back to Humongous was welcomed by some.



DIABLO 2'S AMAZON
Don't expect to slip into her outfit until August.

Rumor ticker: **Ensemble** is working on an expansion for AGE OF EMPIRES 2: AGE OF KINGS. We should see it this summer....**Hasbro** has been showing their upcoming games on a press tour, and X-COM ALLIANCE seems less playable now than it did at ECTS. Meanwhile, a Hasbro producer has been soliciting fan sites for ideas for a MASTER OF ORION 3, so that's apparently in the works....**Bill Gates** is expected to announce the X-box, a TV set-top gaming system, at the Game Developers Conference in March. This would-be PlayStation 2 killer should ship in the third quarter of 2001....DIABLO 2 is now slipping until August, and several **Blizzard** notables—including Bill Roper—have gone to Blizzard North to oversee the final development efforts....**Nels Bruckner** and two other developers are leaving **Dynamix**, which is not doing TRIBES 2 development any good. What I hear is that Dynamix is struggling with the bot AI for that game, which is one of the untold reasons why TRIBES EXTREME was cancelled...**New World Computing's** HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC is being ported to the Game Boy Color. "HOMM, I choose you!" Take that, Pikachu....Rumor is that **Gonalo Lira**, author of the spy thriller *Counterpart* from Putnam, is the man who penned the backstory for Activision's SOLDIER OF FORTUNE. SOLDIER OF FORTUNE is, of course, the game where you can target and hit an enemy in a place where it really hurts. Gentlemen, I think you know what I mean.

Got a hot tip to share? Tell it to Mr. Sneaky at sneaky@zd.com. He's always there for you.

Spies Like Us

GameSpy Branching Out With More Funky Internet Game Tools

By now, you've either seen or at least heard of GameSpy 3D. It's that nifty utility (it's on our disc this month) that connects you to hundreds of servers playing your favorite games. Now, GameSpy Industries is bringing us even more cool tools for Internet gaming.

Due this March (hopefully) is GameSpy Arcade, a much more social utility than GameSpy 3D. With GameSpy Arcade, players will be able to take charge of their games by connecting to a giant chat server and setting up net games as they would over a LAN. One player becomes the host, and everyone else joins their game. It all makes for some crazy peer-to-peer action. Players will be able to chat, browse the Web, and keep track of their friends. And best of all, you won't need any quarters to play.

But GameSpy Industries aren't limiting themselves to just gaming. They've recently released RadioSpy, and for those who tired of listening to the same lame music repeated over and over on the local soft-rock station, it's a godsend. RadioSpy does for streaming radio stations what GameSpy does for Internet gaming. Sign on to RadioSpy, and you'll be greeted with thousands of live MP3 streams, categorized by genre and run by Joe-Sixpack. Want to set up your own station? You can SHOUTcast your mp3s directly into RadioSpy, no questions asked, no fees required. And don't worry about censorship, either: GameSpy Industries has made it abundantly clear that they have no interest in regulating what can and can't be played.

Oh, and for those of you who've been listening to that CHRONO TRIGGER soundtrack over and over again until your ears bleed, here's a comforting thought: RadioSpy plays host to a number of gaming music stations. In fact, there's a whole subsection of game music stations to listen to. Now, if only someone will convert the music from STAR CONTROL 2 into mp3 format...—*Alex Handy*

Gamestock 2000

continued from page 37

Relic's next non-HOMEWORLD game would be for Microsoft, not Sierra.

In the sports department, MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2 had the cynical press corps fighting amongst ourselves to play the game (for more, see our preview on p. 58). And LINKS 2001 boasted an absolutely stunning rendering engine, a long-awaited course architect mode, and a new professional online league with prize cups in the $100,000 range.

Sidewinder Meets *Sleeper*

Finally, Microsoft trotted out three new hardware devices: the Sidewinder Force Feedback 2 (with an on-board power supply); the nifty SideWinder Game Voice, a headset for voice chat during gaming; and the SideWinder Strategic Commander, a futuristic device straight out of Woody Allen's *Sleeper* that functions as a left-handed controller specifically for real-time strategy games. We weren't sure what to make of this controller at first, but after playing AGE OF EMPIRES 2 with it, we saw the attraction—it will let gamers assign powerful macros to a single button, easily scroll and zoom maps, and much more.

Microsoft is the last company that needs any PR help from us, but as Gamestock 2000 showed, they're more serious than ever about their gaming, so what can we say except, more power to them. God help us all. —*Jeff Green*

PIPELINE

Yes, we're going with a new format starting this month. We know that game developers tend to use dartboards when determining release dates, so we broke out with even bigger dartboards for the Pipeline. Sometimes, we'll nail the release down to the month, other times we'll give the developers some breathing room by using a general season. Also, we'll highlight some of the more notable releases and pass some preliminary judgement on them before the real reviews are written. Lastly, if you're a publisher, make sure you tell us where your darts have been hitting, so that we're not completely blind, okay? Send notices to: cgwpipeline@zd.com

Notable Releases

STARLANCER: After FREESPACE 2 and before FREELANCER, it's hard to say where this effort from the PRIVATEER II team will land.



HIGH HEAT 2001: Sequel to our Sports Game Of The Year. 'Nuff said. We don't even need get into the crippling rituals that baseball fanatic Robert Coffey goes through in anticipation of this game.



MIGHT & MAGIC VIII: DAY OF THE DESTROYER: RPG grognards may be able to look past the dated engine, but the rest of the industry is asking for an engine that isn't four years old.



	THEY SAY	WE SAY
4 x 4 Evolution G.O.D.	Fall 2000	Dec 2000
American McGee's Alice EA	Winter 2000	Dec 2000
Allegiance Microsoft	March 2000	March 2000
Anachronox Eidos	March 2000	Sept 2000
Arcanum Sierra	Summer 2000	Summer 2000
Baldur's Gate II: Shadows Of Amn Interplay	Summer 2000	Sept 2000
Black & White EA	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Blair Witch Project(s) G.O.D.	Winter 2000	Spring 2001
Codename: Eagle TalonSoft	Spring 2000	Spring 2000
Conquest: Frontier Wars Microsoft	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
Crimson Skies Microsoft	Summer 2000	Summer 2000
Dark Reign 2 Activision	Spring 2000	Spring 2000
Deus Ex Eidos	April 2000	June 2000
Diablo II Blizzard	June 2000	Dec 2000
Duke Nukem Forever 3D Realms	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Dungeon Siege Microsoft	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
Evil Dead: Ashes 2 Ashes THQ	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
Felony Pursuit THQ	Spring 2000	Spring 2000
Fly! 2K G.O.D.	Winter 2000	Dec 2000
Fly! II G.O.D.	Winter 2000	Spring 2001
Force Commander LucasArts	Spring 2000	??
Freelancer Microsoft	Winter 2000	Spring 2001
Giants: Citizen Kabuto Interplay	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Ground Control Sierra Studios	Spring 2000	Summer 2000
Halo Bungie	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Harpoon 4 SSI	Summer 2000	Summer 2000
Heavy Metal F.A.K.K. 2 G.O.D.	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Icewind Dale Interplay	June 2000	June 2000
Kingdom Under Fire G.O.D.	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
KISS: Psycho Circus G.O.D.	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Loose Cannon Microsoft	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Max Payne G.O.D.	Winter 2000	Feb 2001
Microsoft Baseball 2001 Microsoft	April 2000	April 2000
Motocross Madness 2 Microsoft	June 2000	June 2000
Need for Speed: Motor City Electronic Arts	Spring 2000	??

	THEY SAY	WE SAY
Neverwinter Nights Interplay	Winter 2000	Spring 2001
Oni Bungie	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Pool Of Radiance II SSI	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Reach for the Stars SSI	Summer 2000	Summer 2000
Return To Wolfenstein Activision	Nov 2000	Nov 2000
Rock GT Interactive	Fall 2000	??
Rune G.O.D.	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Sammy Sosa Super Softball Slam 3DO	April 2000	April 2000
Sanity Monolith	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Settlers IV Blue Byte	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Shadow Watch Red Storm Entertainment	Spring 2000	Spring 2000
Shogun: Total War EA	Spring 2000	Summer 2000
Sid Meier's Civilization III MicroProse	Winter 2000	Spring 2001
Silent Hunter II SSI	Spring 2000	Summer 2000
SimMars Maxis	Fall 2000	Spring 2001
Simon The Sorceror 3D Southpeak Interactive	Summer 2000	Summer 2000
Soldier of Fortune Activision	March 2000	March 2000
Sovereign Sony Online Entertainment	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Star Trek Armada Activision	Spring 2000	Spring 2000
Star Trek Deep Space 9: The Fallen Simon & Schuster	Aug 2000	Aug 2000
Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force Activision	Spring 2000	Summer 2000
Summoner THQ	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
Tachyon: The Fringe Novalogic	Spring 2000	Summer 2000
Team Fortress 2 Sierra	Summer 2000	Christmas
The Longest Journey FunCom	Summer 2000	Winter 2000
The Real Neverending Story Discreet Monsters	Summer 2000	Summer 2000
Thief 2: The Metal Age Eidos	March 2000	April 2000
Throne Of Darkness Sierra	Summer 2000	Winter 2000
Tribes 2 Sierra	April 2000	June 2000
Triple Play 2001 EA Sports	April 2000	April 2000
Tzar: Burden Of The Crown TalonSoft	Spring 2000	Spring 2000
Vampire: The Masquerade Activision	March 2000	May 2000
WarCraft III Blizzard	Dec 2000	Summer 2001
Warlords: Battlecry SSI	Spring 2000	Summer 2000

DON'T SLEEP!



"...may be the future for on-line gaming." – GamePr



Enlist with a global community of mercenaries and lead commando-style attacks deep into enemy lines.



Amass an impenetrable defense with Chaos Turrents, Behemoth Rovers, Chain Guns and tons of devastating hi-tech weaponry.



Strategically organize attacks against enemy camps on all fronts with top-down and first-person point of views.

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Little Green Men Spilling Little Red Corpuscles

Y2K Is Going To Be a Bad Year for Alien Invaders

With two titles seeking to expand and build upon the legacy of *CGW* Hall of Famer X-COM: UFO DEFENSE, 2000 figures to be a very good year for alien hunters and a very, very bad one for the little mind-bending bastards from Mars. It should be an interesting face-off, with Microprose's license-holding X-COM ALLIANCE representing the body of the series, and Bethesda Softworks' DREAMLAND CHRONICLES: FREEDOM RIDGE representing the spirit.


X-COM ALLIANCE

X-COM ALLIANCE has more in common with RAINBOW SIX and its ilk than its own source material. Gamers will play as the leader of a four-man squad infiltrating various alien installations across several planets. At first glance, the UNREAL engine-powered ALLIANCE may look like just another Tom Clancy rip-off, but the design team is making a real effort to duplicate many of the things that made X-COM so engrossing. Every squad member will have special abilities that will increase with use; you'll still research alien technology; and the vulnerable minds of your team members will still be part of the background. Slated for a Q3 release, ALLIANCE shows some promise, though we worry that meaningless puzzles and other shooter-type design traps could suck all the X-COM flavor right out of the game.

Hardcore X-COM fans will be most excited by Bethesda's game, since the original X-COM designers (Mythos Games) are building this one—it's not an official sequel the same way ALPHA CENTAURI (wink wink, nudge nudge) isn't a CIVILIZATION II sequel. DREAMLAND CHRONICLES: FREEDOM RIDGE retains the classic turn-based squad tactics and overall strategy of the original, as gamers strive to liberate a future Earth enslaved by aliens. Instead of buying weaponry and soliciting money from world governments, the covert nature of your revolt will force you to seize or capture what you need. Take over a town to recruit manpower; liberate an ammo dump for munitions. FREEDOM RIDGE is the first game of a series, and is being built to retain the random nature of X-COM's firefights while still telling a complex story involving humans, alien factions, and those shadowy Men in Black. Fully 3D with all the requisite lighting effects, deformable terrain, and free-floating camera movement, FREEDOM RIDGE is the clear spiritual successor to the X-COM throne. *–Robert Coffey*

Brian Reynolds Leaves Firaxis

The Gaming God Behind CIV 2 and ALPHA CENTAURI Hits the Road

The news hit strategy-gaming fans with all the force of a dinosaur-destroying asteroid: Firaxis announced that Brian Reynolds, the chief force behind SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION 2 and SID MEIER'S ALPHA CENTAURI, was leaving Firaxis. *Computer Gaming World* contacted both Firaxis and Reynolds to follow up on this surprise announcement.

Kelley Gilmore, Communications Manager at Firaxis, declined to comment on Reynolds' plans. Gilmore did say that his leaving should have no adverse effect on the development of CIVILIZATION 3, which Reynolds was heading up. "Obviously we had to do some reorganization, but the reality is that we have a pretty deep team here that is very experienced in the whole CIVILIZATION line. Sid Meier will continue to direct creative development, just as he has been all along." In the Firaxis press release Sid Meier praised Reynolds, calling him a "talented designer." Firaxis has known about Reynolds' planned departure since December.

This was just the start, though. It was widely believed that Reynolds would form his own game company, and that's just what he did several weeks later, announcing Big Huge Games. In what is sure to be a blow to the development of current Firaxis games (Meier's DINOSAUR game and CIVILIZATION 3), three other notable Firaxis employees are joining Reynolds at Big Huge Games. Tim Train—the producer and designer of ALIEN CROSSFIRE, producer of Sid Meier's ALPHA CENTAURI, and producer of CIVILIZATION 3—is signing up with Big Huge. Also leaving is Jason Coleman, senior programmer at Firaxis and the man who built their development libraries and coded the graphics engines for their games. The third notable Firaxis employee to leave is David Inscore, the lead artist on the DINOSAUR project.

In a further surprise, Reynolds, who has made his reputation on turn-based games, said that Big Huge is going to make real-time strategy games. "Yes, turn-based games are fun, but now we want to try real-time," said Reynolds in an interview with *CGW*. "That is the kind of game to which we are all addicted. We think we can bring something new and exciting to the genre. Clearly historical games have been our strength, but we haven't ruled out any type of subgenre at this point. We have a number of ideas that are cool and fun."

Reynolds also told *CGW* that Big Huge hasn't settled on a publisher yet, though several have shown a lot of interest. He said he wasn't ready to announce anything on that front.—*Mark Asher*

Gamestock Trivia Cup 2000

Microsoft's Attempt to Stump the World's Geekiest Game Journalists

For the second year in a row, Microsoft kicked off its Gamestock event with a gaming trivia contest, which pitted groups of journalists against each other in hopes of winning a lava lamp for each member of the victorious team. Journalists were divided up at random, so that the geniuses at *CGW* couldn't clump together and easily walk away with the award. Unfortunately, no one from *CGW* ended up on the winning team, which tells us that the event was fixed, obviously. Here's a small sample of what they asked. Get all of them right, and you win the Geek Who Most Needs To Turn Off The PC And Go Outside award.

1. What was different about the character of Lara Croft as she appeared in the opening tutorial level of TOMB RAIDER: THE LAST REVELATION?
2. Which former head of Trilobyte Studios was appointed to the role of game designer at id Software?
3. LucasArts' adventure game tie-in with The Phantom Menace let you control which four characters during various parts of the game?
4. According to PC Data figures, what was the top-selling game aimed primarily at girls in 1999?
5. Which "groovy" B-movie actor signed on to provide the voice of lead character Jake Logan, in Novalogic's space-combat sim TACHYON: THE FRINGE?
6. The voice of Duke Nukem — radio DJ John St. John — also provided voice talent for another popular 3D game in 1999. Name it. A bonus point for the character he voiced.
7. Poker expert Sklansky lent his name to a poker simulation published by which company?
8. Which two members of the Star Trek: Next Generation cast gave voice to their characters in Activision's recent Trek game HIDDEN EVIL?
9. Name the real-life mercenary who served as technical advisor on Raven Software's SOLDIER OF FORTUNE.
10. Which former LAPD police chief was an advisor on Sierra's POLICE QUEST series?
11. Name the three character classes you can play in the original DIABLO. Score one point for each.
12. Name the four character classes in Atari's classic coin-op GAUNTLET (not just the character classes, but their actual names too).
13. What four-digit number was associated with the Commodore 64's floppy disk drive?
14. The original PRINCE OF PERSIA gave players three lives and a fixed real-time limit of exactly how long to complete the game?
15. What cheat code do you type into DOOM to obtain all weapons and ammo?
16. In Sega's classic coin-op OUTRUN, which make of car did you drive?
17. What is the name of the character you play in PLANESCAPE: TORMENT?
18. The first role-playing game ever written by Richard Garriott, prior to ULTIMA I, was called what?
19. SYSTEM SHOCK 2 takes place aboard which two stricken starships?
20. Which famous speedway track is missing from NASCAR LEGENDS due to an exclusive licensing agreement with Sega?

ANSWERS

1. She was a teenager.
2. Graeme Devine
3. Obi-Wan Kenobi, Qui-Gon Jinn, Queen Amidala, Captain Panaka
4. BARBIE RIDING CLUB
5. Bruce Campbell
6. HALF-LIFE OPPOSING FORCE. He was the drill instructor.
7. Interplay
8. Patrick Stewart, Brent Spiner
9. John Mullins
10. Daryl Gates
11. Rogue, Warrior, Sorceror
12. Thor the Warrior, Merlin the Wizard, Questor the Elf, Thyra the Valkyrie
13. 1541
14. 60 minutes
15. idkfa
16. Ferrari
17. The Nameless One
18. AKALABETH
19. UNN Rickenbacker, UNN Von Braun
20. Daytona

The Race to 1GHz

Large Clock-Speed Increases on the Horizon

The race between CPU makers Intel and AMD to 1Gigahertz (GHz) clock-speed is on, and like the race to the moon, both parties are hell-bent on being first. Although both CPU makers dismiss the 1GHz mark as merely another checkpoint in the never-ending battle for CPU supremacy, both are also keenly aware that clock speeds sell CPUs. At press time, Intel appeared to have the edge in passing that milestone first. In fact, as you're reading this you may well be able to order a 1GHz Pentium III. How long it will take your favorite PC company to ship it is another story. Given some of the long lead-times gamers have experienced trying to order 800MHz Pentium IIIs, 1GHz Intel CPUs—though technically "shipping"—may be very hard to come by, and very expensive.

At their recent Intel Developers Forum (IDF), Intel showed a Pentium III running at a stunning 1.5GHz. But in a display of spry industry brinkmanship, AMD set up camp a few blocks away to brief industry analysts about their upcoming chips, and flout an Athlon running at 1.1GHz. AMD is planning on shipping 1GHz CPUs by Q3, although the schedule may get moved up to keep pace with Intel.

AMD seems to have gotten Athlon over some of its initial motherboard instability issues, and has curried favor with nearly all the large-volume system makers including Gateway, Compaq, and IBM. Gaming PC makers like Alienware, Falcon, and Hypersonic are also building Athlon-based systems. According to one Alienware official, the coincidence of the recent shortage of high-speed Pentium-III CPUs and RDRAM memory, with the arrival of high-speed Athlon CPUs, has Alienware shipping the bulk of its systems with "Athlon Inside." Alienware still ships Intel-based systems and like the performance Pentium-III delivers, but its customers have been clamoring for Athlon-based systems, and Alienware has been obliging. For the latest on the Athlon/Pentium-III blood feud, check out this month's CPU Slap Down on page 118. — *By Dave Salvator*


AGE of EMPIRES II
THE AGE OF KINGS
You were not born noble,
but your destiny is to reign as king.
+ Command your knights in menacing formations.
+ Dominate the world's marketplaces.
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CGW's Monthly Readers' Poll

Top 40

1 **Half-Life**
Havas Interactive
5 stars



This Month	Last Month	Game/Publisher	CGW Rating
2	3	**StarCraft** Havas Interactive	5
3	3	**Age of Empires II: Age of Kings** Microsoft	5
4	5	**Unreal Tournament** Epic/GT	5
5	4	**Baldur's Gate** Interplay	4
6	6	**StarCraft: Brood War** Havas Interactive	5
7	33	**Homeworld** Havas Interactive	4.5
8	7	**Quake III Arena** Activision	3.5
9	11	**Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear** Red Storm	4.5
10	8	**Thief: The Dark Project** Eidos	4.5
11	15	**Half-Life: Opposing Force** Havas Interactive	3.5
12	9	**Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri** Firaxis	5
13	10	**Heroes of Might & Magic III** 3DO	4.5
NEW	14	–	**Planescape: Torment** Interplay	5
15	14	**Quake II** Activision	4.5
16	16	**Fallout 2** Interplay	4
17	12	**System Shock 2** Electronic Arts	4.5
18	13	**Final Fantasy VII** Eidos	4.5
19	22	**Baldur's Gate: Tales of the Sword Coast** Interplay	4
20	19	**Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun** Electronic Arts	4
21	17	**Grim Fandango** LucasArts	4.5
22	21	**SimCity 3000** Electronic Arts	4
23	18	**Freespace 2** Interplay	4.5
24	20	**Rollercoaster Tycoon** Hasbro Interactive	4
25	26	**Aliens vs. Predator** Fox	3
26	23	**MechWarrior 3** Hasbro	3
27	40	**Need for Speed 4: High Stakes** Electronic Arts	5
28	24	**Dungeon Keeper II** Electronic Arts	4.5
29	30	**Worms Armageddon** Hasbro	4
30	25	**Jagged Alliance 2** TalonSoft	4.5
NEW	31	–	**Starfleet Command** Interplay	4.5
32	38	**Age of Empires: Rise of Rome** Microsoft	4
33	27	**EverQuest** Sony	4
34	31	**Heroes III: Armageddon's Blade** 3DO	4.5
35	29	**Caesar III** Havas Interactive	4.5
36	39	**FIFA 2000** Electronic Arts	4.5
37	28	**Myth II** Bungie	4.5
38	32	**Railroad Tycoon II** G.O.D.	4.5
39	37	**Total Annihilation: Core Contingency** Cavedog	4.5
40	35	**NHL 2000** Electronic Arts	3.5

NEW POLLING PLACE!
Vote in the Top 40 Games poll at www.computergaming.com. The more people who vote, the better the results, but please vote only once per month.

PLANESCAPE: TORMENT makes its Top 40 debut this month at #14. A strong start, to be sure, but it's got a long way to go before challenging the reigning RPG champ, BALDUR'S GATE. In other news, HOMEWORLD, *CGW*'s Strategy Game Of The Year, made a hyperspace jump to #7, up 23 spots. Check in next month to see if THE SIMS can shake up the top of the charts.

Top Action Games

This Month	Last Month	Game / Publisher	CGW Rating
1	1	**Half-Life** Havas Interactive	5
2	2	**Unreal Tournament** Epic/GT	5
3	3	**Quake III Arena** id/Activision	4.5
4	5	**Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear** Red Storm	4.5
5	4	**Thief: The Dark Project** Eidos	4.5

Top Adventure/RPG Games

This Month	Last Month	Game / Publisher	CGW Rating
1	1	**Baldur's Gate** Interplay	4.5
NEW	2	–	**Planescape: Torment** Interplay	5
3	4	**Fallout 2** Interplay	4
4	2	**System Shock 2** Electronic Arts	4.5
5	3	**Final Fantasy VII** Eidos	4.5

Top Simulations Games

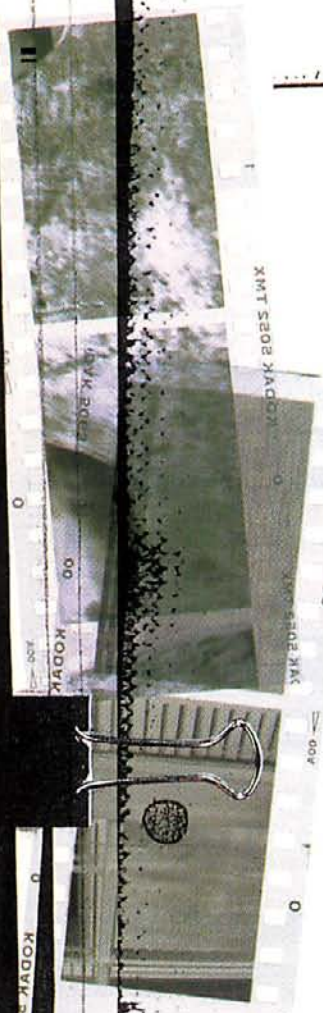
This Month	Last Month	Game / Publisher	CGW Rating
1	1	**Freespace 2** Interplay	4.5
2	2	**MechWarrior 3** Hasbro Interactive	3
3	3	**Wing Commander: Prophecy Gold** Electronic Arts	4
4	5	**Falcon 4.0** Hasbro Interactive	3.5
NEW	5	–	**European Air War** Hasbro Interactive	4

Top Sports/Racing Games

This Month	Last Month	Game / Publisher	CGW Rating
1	3	**Need For Speed: High Stakes** Electronic Arts	5
2	2	**FIFA 2000** EA Sports	4.5
3	1	**NHL 2000** EA Sports	3
4	4	**Midtown Madness** Microsoft	4
5	5	**NBA Live 2000** EA Sports	5

Top Strategy/War Games

This Month	Last Month	Game / Publisher	CGW Rating
1	1	**StarCraft** Havas Interactive	5
2	2	**Age of Empires II: Age of Kings** Microsoft	5
3	3	**StarCraft: Brood War** Havas Interactive	5
NEW	4	–	**Homeworld** Havas Interactive	4.5
5	4	**Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri** Firaxis	5



****CONFIDENTIAL****

III. BREAKING THE OATH: TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES ~~XCONSEQUENCES~~

1. A verbal warning accompanied by a review of security oath.
2. A stronger warning, sometimes accompanied by browbeating ~~intimidation~~ and intimidation.
3. Psychologically working on an individual to bring on depression that will lead to suicide.
4. **Elimination of the individual** that has been made to appear as an accident, suicide or heart attack

Sources say Deus Ex was created by Ion Storm to **uncover the truth.** Some say it's merely the latest conspiracy fueled by a madman. And some say it's a future training tool made to look like a hyperrealistic 3-D roleplaying computer game. Whatever it is, **proceed with caution.** They know you want it.

[SECTOR 1]

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- Send any and all information to www.unatco.com. It could be the difference between life and death.

- Establish a new base of operations with [redacted] and forge alliances.

- Find a way to build your own capabilities to the point where you have a chance of defeating the one with God-like powers.



Item No. 14428 562

CONSEQUENCES:

Diagram B2 Situational Missions (Fig.'s 2.1-2.6)

Fig. 2.1 build your own capabilities



Fig. 2.2 establish base of operations



Fig. 2.3 maintain control over Ambrosia

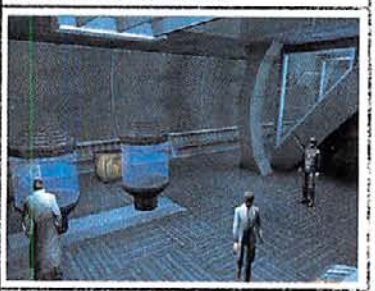


Fig. 2.4 Survive incarceration



Fig. 2.5 establish ties to ally base



Fig. 2.6 Expand your pool of allies

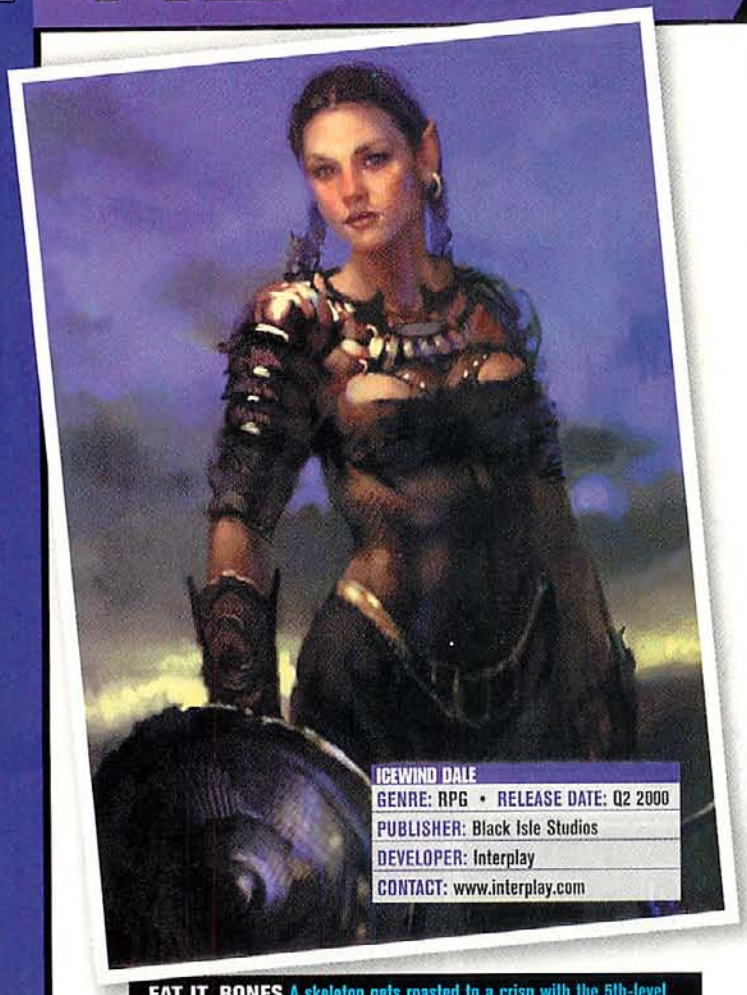


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ICEWIND DALE
GENRE: RPG • RELEASE DATE: Q2 2000
PUBLISHER: Black Isle Studios
DEVELOPER: Interplay
CONTACT: www.interplay.com

EAT IT, BONES A skeleton gets roasted to a crisp with the 5th-level Flame Strike spell.



NEED A RUN KEY You'll spend most of your time in ICEWIND DALE fighting in dungeons. Here, a cleric casts Sanctuary.



Icewind Dale

Black Isle Studios Serves Up an AD&D Hack-and-Slash RPG

by Jeff Green

Black Isle Studios isn't just on a roll these days—they're on a d100 roll with a +10 bonus to all attacks. (Sorry.) Interplay's RPG group, created out of thin air a few years ago during role-playing's most notorious slump, has, to everyone's surprise, emerged as perhaps the dominant RPG maker in computer gaming today—eclipsing the achievements of RPG heavyweights like New World Computing and Origin. If you think that's a bit hyperbolic, consider this: They have now won *CGW*'s (and many other publications') RPG Of The Year award three years in a row—for FALLOUT in 1997, BALDUR'S GATE (through Bioware) in 1998, and PLANESCAPE: TORMENT in 1999. And they show no signs of slowing down.

While everyone waits for Bioware's highly anticipated BALDUR'S GATE 2, Black Isle hopes to satiate their fantasy RPG fans with ICEWIND DALE—a straight-up, old-fashioned, hack-and-slash dungeon romp set in *Dungeons and Dragons'* Forgotten Realms universe. Yeah, you can go ahead and say the "D" word (DIABLO)—Black Isle won't deny the obvious influence. In fact, the looming, gigantic presence of DIABLO 2 is a very good reason why you'll probably see ICEWIND DALE sooner, rather than later—they want to beat Blizzard's monster out the door.

Shut Up and Fight

Unlike their three previous RPGs, there is no central hero to ICEWIND DALE. As in the classic RPGs of yore, you'll start the game by creating your entire party (up to six characters), and the game will open in a pub where the adventurers are hanging out, looking for a good epic story to get mixed up in. It's the classic *D&D* setup.

You'll begin the game in Easthaven, one of the "Ten Towns" of the Icewind Dale region in the far northwest tip of the world, and soon find yourself joining an expedition to the mountain-pass town of Kuldahar, where you must help fight (what else?) a great evil plaguing the area. From Kuldahar, a number of quests will branch out around the Spine of the World mountain range—and Black Isle is still keeping quiet about what the larger plot points will be here.

Perhaps the main thing to note, however, is that though there is a story here, the emphasis is *not* on plot or dialogue, but on combat. Dialogue is largely going to be used to drive you forward to the next combat situation—there won't be a lot of random yammering going on. Just to give you something to compare it to, ICEWIND DALE is going to have about 250,000 words of dialogue, compared to BALDUR'S GATE's 500,000 and PLANESCAPE:

TORMENT'S 900,000. "We want people out killing everything they see," said associate producer Darren Monahan, "not sitting and flapping all day." On the other hand, role-players shouldn't worry that dialogue is totally superfluous or superficial—it isn't. There will be different dialogue options depending on alignment, sex, class, and race, and how you choose to respond could affect how certain conversations and quests play out.

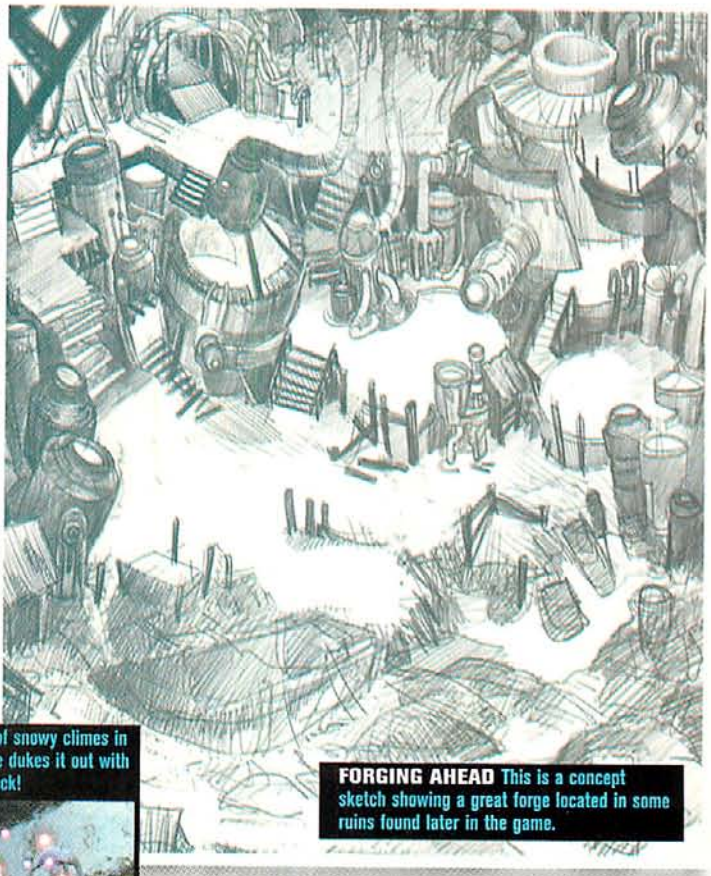
While BALDUR'S GATE was set in a largely undeveloped area of the Forgotten Realms, Icewind Dale is one of most well-known areas, thanks to a number of best-selling books by Robert Salvatore. But Black Isle was only granted the use of the Icewind Dale setting because they were promising a plot-light dungeon romp, thus ensuring that the game wouldn't mess with any official continuity. Thus, hardcore fans should know that the game will *not* feature any of the major characters from the book, such as the ever-popular dark elf Drizzt, or Wulfgar the Barbarian. And just to make sure we're all clear on that, Black Isle set the game in the year 1281, a full 16 years before the first recorded mention of Drizzt.

Rules of the Game

As far as the gameplay goes, those familiar with BALDUR'S GATE will be right at home here—expect no big changes or surprises this time around. ICEWIND DALE will use Bioware's Infinity engine with a few minor modifications (some created by Bioware for BALDUR'S GATE 2)—including a "bumping" technology that should help eliminate some pathfinding problems, an accelerated walking speed (you won't be able to run, as in PLANESCAPE), the ability to rest your party until fully healed, and integrated Mplayer matching support for multiplayer games.

Black Isle has also made a couple subtle modifications to the interface that may go unnoticed by many, but will be greatly appreciated by those who obsessed over BALDUR'S GATE. The Rest button has been unburied and moved to the main screen; the Guard button has been removed (since, apparently, no one used it in BALDUR'S GATE); and dialogue is going to float above the characters as in PLANESCAPE.

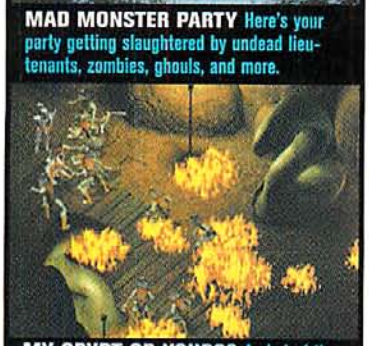
Combat is going to use fundamentally the same system—there's just going to be a lot more of it. As Chris Parker—ICEWIND DALE's producer—described the game, "You're either going to be in a fight or licking your wounds," and he estimated that well over 90 percent of the game takes place in the dungeons themselves. The biggest change to combat actually occurs at the character creation stage. Weapons proficiency has been altered to more closely reflect the *AD&D* Second Edition rules, which have you optionally assign your character a proficiency in a specific weapon, rather than a general class of weapons as in BALDUR'S GATE. This should add greater strategic depth to the combat, as should Black Isle's promise of smarter monsters, who will use terrain to their advantage.



FORGING AHEAD This is a concept sketch showing a great forge located in some ruins found later in the game.



SNOW DAY Expect lots of snowy climes in ICEWIND DALE. Here, a mage dukes it out with a snow troll. That's gotta suck!



MAD MONSTER PARTY Here's your party getting slaughtered by undead lieutenants, zombies, ghouls, and more.



MY CRYPT OR YOURS? A shot of the party meeting more friendly undead (skeletons, armored or otherwise).

At the moment, Black Isle is saying that there will be around forty new spells in the game. In addition, the experience cap is currently set at about 1.8 million points, which will let your characters grow to between Level 14 to 16, depending on class (all characters will start at Level 1).

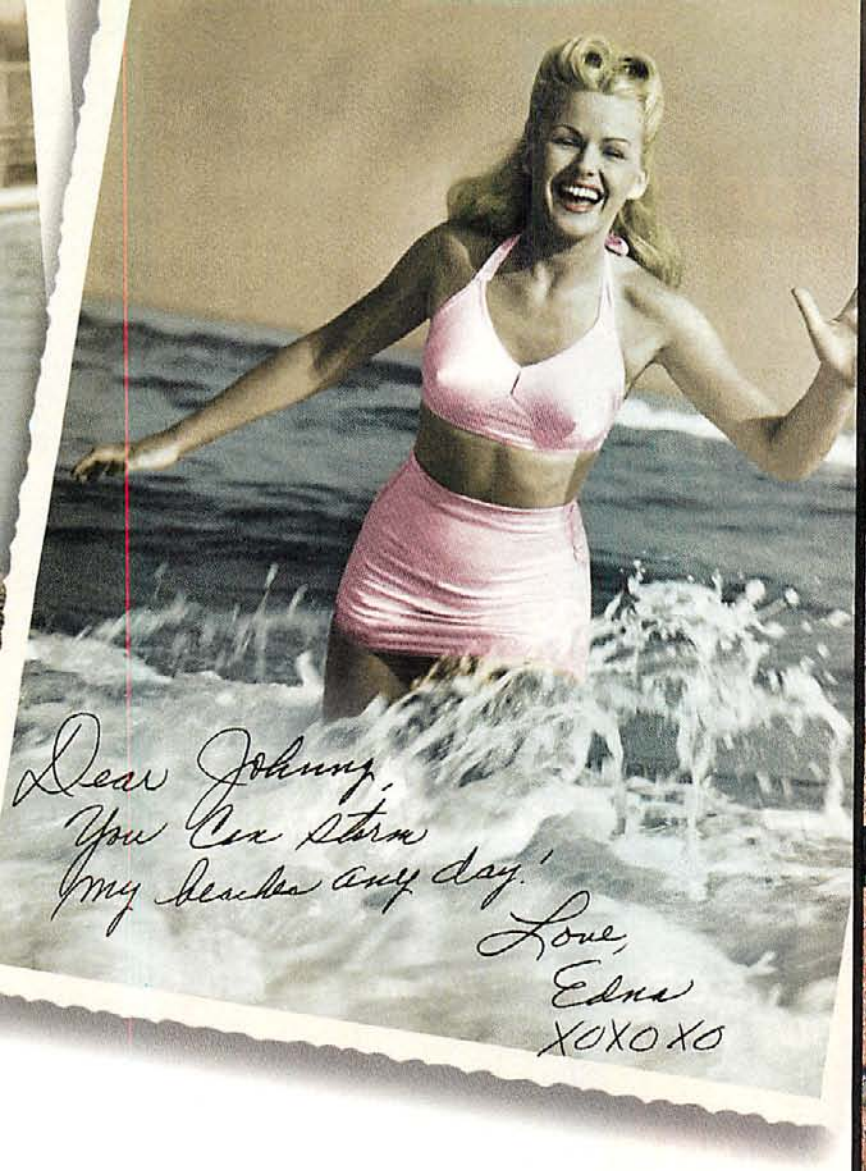
You Got a Purty Mouth

The artwork was still in progress when I checked out the game, but what I saw—some dungeons, character portraits, and other background art—revealed that the game is going to easily live up to the high standards set by the earlier games, with the same combination of meticulously rendered backgrounds and lovingly painted high-fantasy portraits. Expect to see lots of ice- and snow-covered mountainsides, along with geothermal caves, ancient crypts, ruined Elven towers, and Dwarven keeps—all the stuff that keeps fantasy fans up way too late at night.

ICEWIND DALE, with its complex gaming system rooted in *AD&D*, its already-proven engine, and its meticulous artwork, is far more than just a DIABLO clone—and may in fact be that deeper, more hardcore hack-and-slash experience that many gamers have lusted after. Will it rise to the level of quality established by the other Black Isle RPGs? Hope for some good dice rolls when the game ships later this year. CGW



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Edna? How'd you get this number? No! I can't talk right now...we're about to launch a major offensive!









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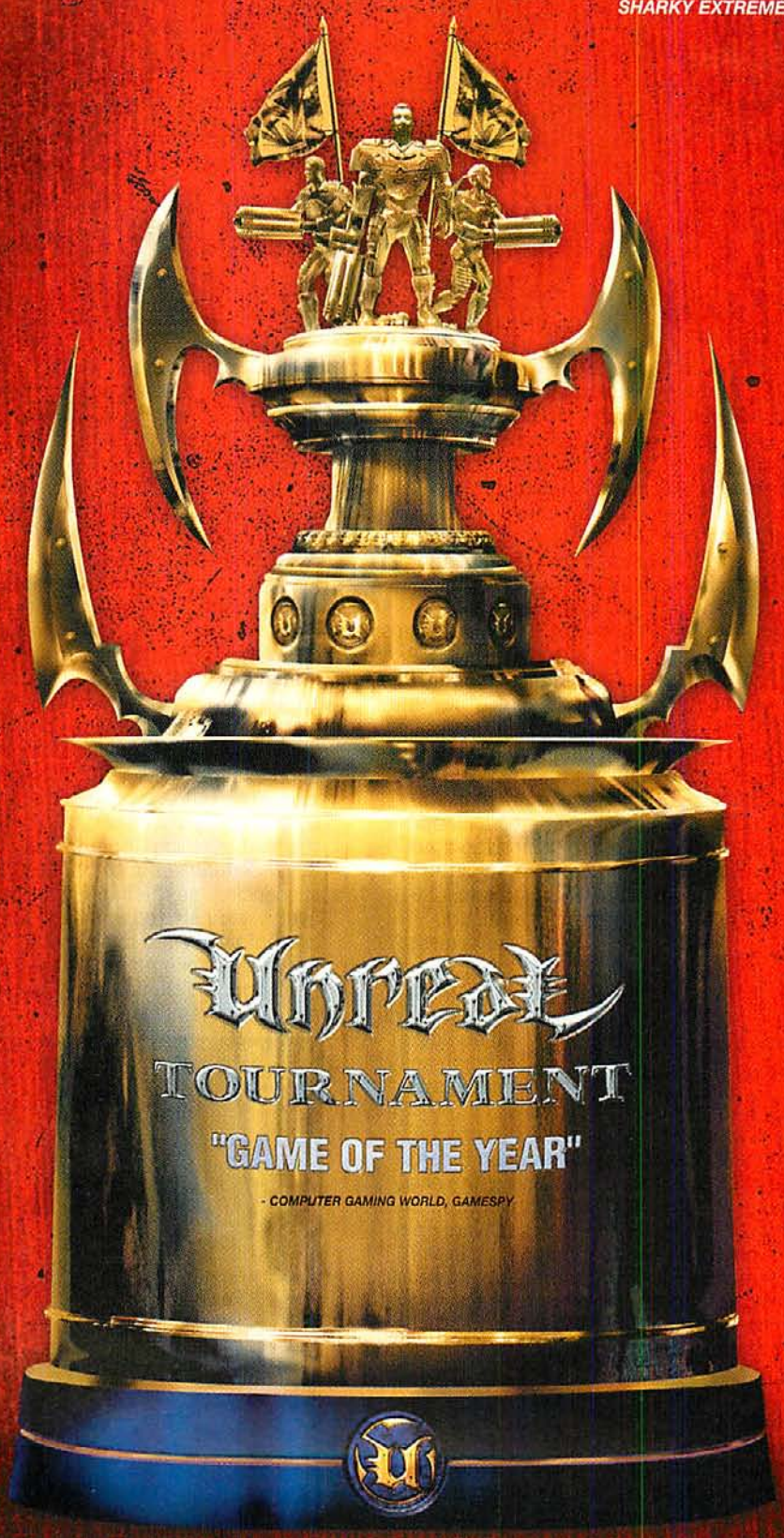
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Motocross Madness 2

Rainbow Studios Gets Down and Dirty With Hotly Anticipated Sequel

by Gord Goble

When MOTOCROSS MADNESS left the gates back in the summer of '98, PC riders were suddenly faced with a whole new concept—freedom. Freedom to race through point-to-point or closed-course circuits, freedom to explore the world outside the designated track, and freedom to forsake the racing altogether and embark upon a trick-turning orgy to put Heidi Fleiss to shame. It was dirt bike action on a grand and muddy scale, and it's coming at us once more in this summer's hotly anticipated follow-up, MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2.

Again developed by Phoenix-based media production house Rainbow Studios, Microsoft's latest journey into high-flying motocross action promises to dramatically advance the sensory experience while adhering to the "simulation meets arcade" flavor of the first title. To that end, Rainbow has designed the entire game in-house, with virtually all original design-team members.

Certainly MADNESS 2 promises to be nothing if not comprehensive, with larger environments than the original, more tracks (48 in all), more events (a total of 64), new exploration-style "Enduro" racing, authentic motocross bikes, and a Pro Circuit mode that will guide riders through an entire career and 40 individual events. But the big news out of Rainbow can be expressed in one word: Graphics.

MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2
GENRE: Racing • RELEASE DATE: June 2000
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Rainbow Studios
CONTACT: www.microsoft.com/games/motocross2/

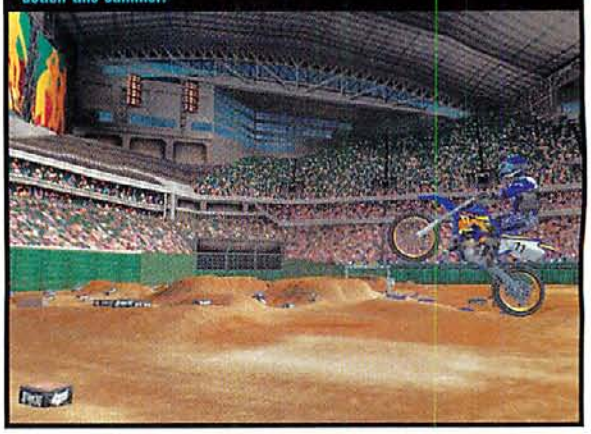
According to MADNESS lead designer Robb Rinard, the days of barren landscapes are a thing of the past. This time around, environments will feature "terrain with the illusion of one-half inch resolution" and up to "nine times as much raw geometry data than in the first game, where we had a huge terrain, but no sense of being in a particular place. Now we have entire ecosystems, ranging from forest to desert to tropical locations, each with numerous settings such as farms and trailer parks inside them."

And those new landscapes aren't merely for show, either. MADNESS 2 will introduce fully-interactive elements such as animated freight trains and missile silos—items that must be operated or otherwise dealt with by the rider. In Enduro racing, gamers can expect to pick their way through forests and other natural roadblocks just to find a quicker route between gates—an interesting new wrinkle to be sure, especially when some Enduros are stocked with upwards of 100,000 individual trees, and each of them with a polygon count of 150–300.

To better analyze and improve your ride, the game offers a pair of new utilities: a VCR-type replay suite, and an innovative ghost-racing mode that records each consecutive fastest lap and then replays it immediately for your riding pleasure. Satisfied racers can then send their finest ghost laps to friends for what is essentially a delayed multiplayer mode, or they can simply pass along their most horrific accidents. To sweeten the pot, Rinard says MADNESS 2 will offer even more broken-boned hilarity than the first, with "gut-wrenching animations that should make you wince as you laugh."

Rainbow has also made serious moves to enhance the aural experience of MADNESS, wiring real-life motocross rider Stephane Roncada (see sidebar) and recording the sound of a true built-for-racing bike in the heat of action. Rinard recounts, "We put thousand-dollar Sennheiser microphones in backpacks, on the suspension, on the handlebars, under the seat, and everywhere else on Stephane and his bike. Many microphones were crunched and some were destroyed, but on our eleventh multi-day trip into the desert, we finally got it. I think this is the best engine sound in any racing game ever."

Flip, Flop and Fly With courses designed by world-class motocross rider Stephane Roncada, improved suspension technology and dynamic new bike graphics, MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2 is a good bet for hot dirt bike action this summer.



TRAINS, PLANES, AND MOTORCYCLES MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2 will be packed with enough animated objects and environmental obstacles to keep virtual riders constantly busy.



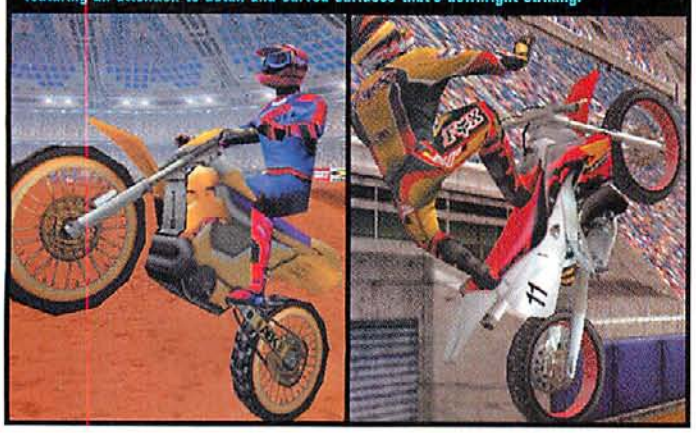
No bird, actually, but one extreme daredevil stunt rider making a very high-level pass over a very low-level flight. Note the foliage down below, something we didn't see in the original game.



Also transformed is the MADNESS bike physics model. Though Rainbow hasn't tinkered appreciably with the steering, Rinard tells us "There were certain aspects of the bike's behavior we didn't like in MOTOCROSS 1. There was no hint of a powerslide and we thought the actions of the suspension could use some work." The solution? Rainbow lead programmer and physics-engine developer Glenn O'Bannon located a PhD thesis on the mathematics behind modern suspensions and progressively-wound spring technology, then incorporated his findings into the game. The result, according to Rinard, is "funky arcade powerslides," more realistic force absorption, and a better ride throughout.

What won't make it to the sequel? As in the original, you won't find handlebars in the first-person view, or lens flare in the sky (Rinard calls the latter "too distracting"). Also not part of the initial release is a track editor, though that doesn't mean Rainbow isn't working on it. In fact, when the MADNESS 2 editor does become available as a no-cost download in late summer, Rinard says we can expect a stand-alone "monster" capable of full-terrain editing and allowing aspiring designers to "hit a button, drop your bike on the new course, and test it right there." All of which sounds mighty cool.

DETAILS, DETAILS... On the left, a circa-1998 MOTOCROSS MADNESS rider. On the right is his 2000 equivalent, decked out in authentic gear, aboard a real Honda bike, and featuring an attention to detail and curved surfaces that's downright striking.



But perhaps the most intriguing MADNESS 2 component will be the Pro Circuit career mode. Here, riders will begin in Enduros with what Rinard calls a "sorry hunk of machinery," no pro racing gear, and a distinct cash shortage. As you progress through the various indoor and outdoor events and move to a better class of bike, you'll be forced to handle such issues as repairs, sponsorship dealings, and—as in real life—medical expenses. And should you fail to maintain a strong championship ranking, get ready for a most shocking development. Suffice it to say that I know all about it, and it sure ain't pretty.

The game as a whole, however, looks to be very pretty indeed. MOTOCROSS MADNESS will support Windows 95, 98, and 2000 when it jumps and crashes its way to retail this June. CGW

STEPHANE RONCADA



20-year-old Stephane Roncada is one of those guys who knows no limitations. A dirt bike rider since the impossibly young age of five, Stephane left his native France in 1997 to seek motocross fame and fortune in the U.S. And he's done just that—the Yamaha of Troy rider has managed to keep himself at or near the top of the championship standings in each of his first three years on the grueling 125cc Supercross and National Championship circuits.

Yet Roncada doesn't confine his love for the sport to the track. An ardent gamer, he was immediately taken with the original MOTOCROSS MADNESS, and in particular its course-generation utility. One year and dozens of self-designed tracks later, Roncada set out to meet the Rainbow Studios team at last summer's E3. He immediately hit it off with Rainbow senior designer Robb Rinard, who picks up the story from there.

"Stephane was very interested in becoming involved, and his role in MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2 has become absolutely huge. He's designed every one of the Supercross tracks and five of the National tracks in the new game, using Photo Shop and 3D Studio MAX. He's an utter prodigy. He has this ability to see the entire track in his head, and then to design obvious lines and hidden, faster lines that allow you to better set up for the sections ahead."

Roncada contributed in other areas of the too, engaging in time-consuming audio capture sessions and assisting with physics modeling and game testing. He maintains an independent website (www.ronronmx.com) filled with information and links on his newest pet project. He certainly seems to be one athlete whose involvement with computer gaming goes far beyond a name on a box.

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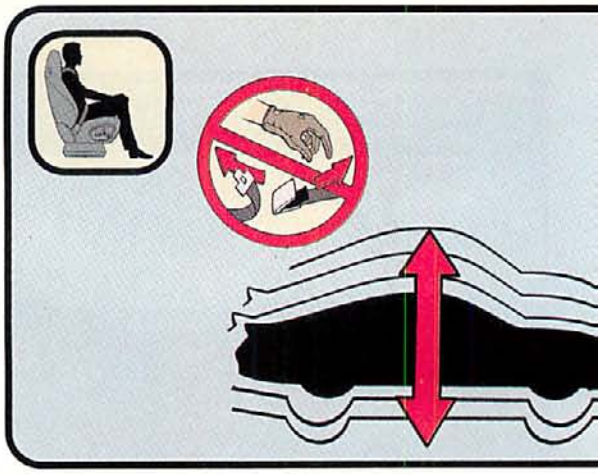
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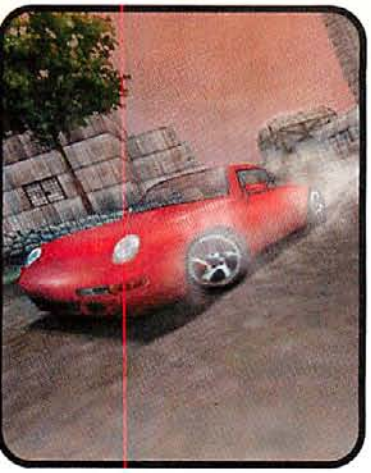


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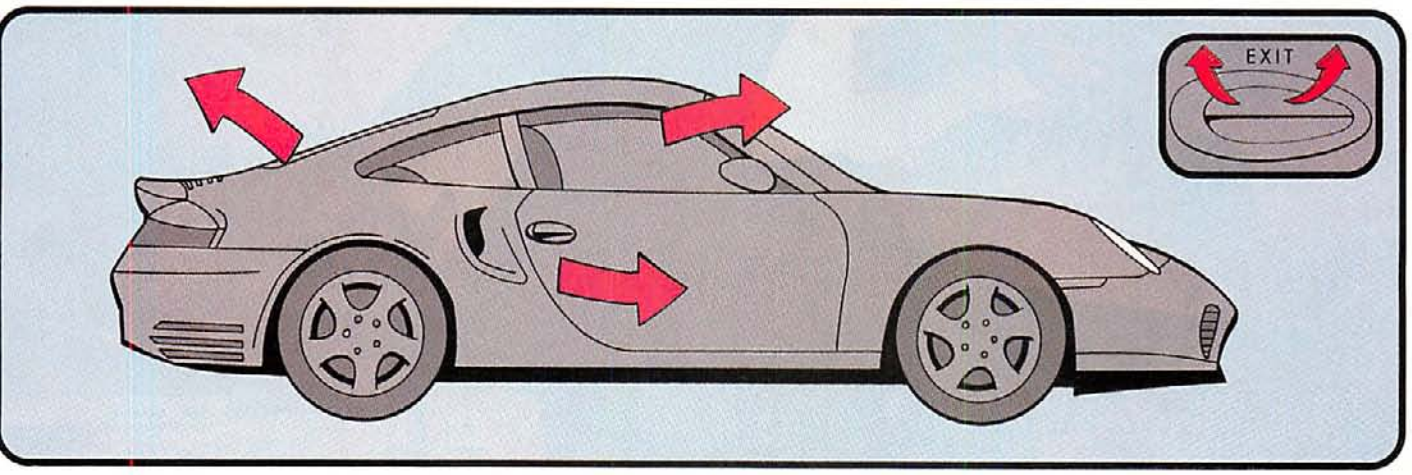




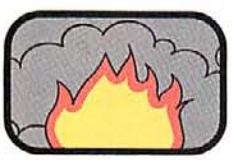




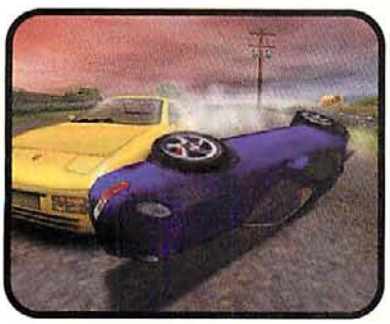


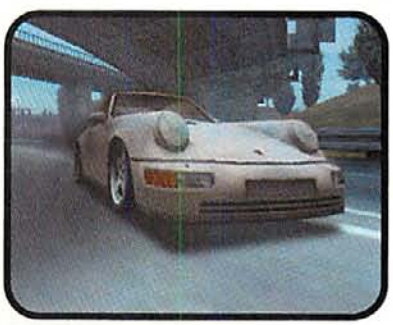






EXIT OPERATION:
OBSERVE SURROUNDINGS. IF SCENERY IS MOVING–REMAIN IN VEHICLE. IF STATIONARY, PROCEED WITH CAUTION TO NEAREST EXIT.





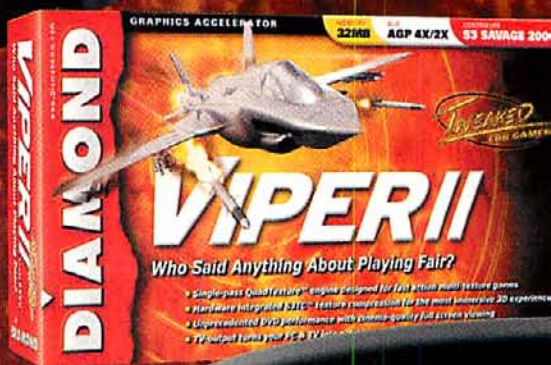


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Independence War 2

Physics Collide With Open-Ended Gameplay

Thierry Nguyen



THE LIGHT, IT BLINDS ME SO I have no idea what's going on here, but dammit, this is one pretty scene.

Space sims have traditionally been about quick, flash-bang-zoom dog-fighting without the constraints of "physics." Consider the irony, then, last year when INDEPENDENCE WAR—a game making heavy use of realistic physics—got the nod for top Sci-Fi Sim within such a fantasy-based genre. In addition to the physics engine, INDEPENDENCE WAR featured a good story and interesting—if linear—mission design. INDEPENDENCE WAR 2 (a working title; the definitive title will most likely be "Independence War" with a subtitle) will retain the same physics model, but this time the mission design will be more open-ended.

Don't expect another spin on the Commonwealth vs. Indie theme from the first game; fast-forward 100 years and you'll have the current setting. The universe is filled with corporations and colonists—think *Blade Runner* mixed with the Western Frontier. The storyline is on a more personal level this time; you start out as young fellow Cal Johnston. After seeing Pa Johnston killed, you're raised by Jefferson Clay (the same Clay from the original game) to become an enterprising space rogue, and then you progress into a Robin Hood-esque freedom fighter.

INDEPENDENCE WAR 2
GENRE: Space Sim
ANTICIPATED RELEASE: Q4 00
PUBLISHER: Infogrames
DEVELOPER: Particle Systems

While the first game focused on naval combat, this one will be on free-form piracy. Glyn Williams, lead designer and founder of Particle Systems, cites ELITE as a major influence here. And so, you won't go through a string of canned missions as in the first game; you'll be given the freedom to pursue your own agenda. The game is split into discrete chapters, and each will have a few missions that require completion before progression; other than that, you can do pretty much whatever you want. The few missions that you must complete mix elements of piracy with bits of old school, "Fighting The Man"-style missions.

The original game had a pretty good-looking engine; its main limitation was its 3D support, which was Glide or bust. Now the team is using Direct3D and reaching into its bag of graphics tricks to render stunning ships. The nebulae and various space backdrops already look snazzy; the ships are going to be dropping your jaws. Through a complicated series of programming tricks, the ships properly reflect light and shadow based on the types of material they're made from and the location of the light source. That is, you get very realistic metallic sheens, lens flares, and reflections—all of which combine to give the ships a tactile look.



HAVE SHIP, WILL TRAVEL This command section of a larger ship may be the biggest ship you'll get.

The ship variety has also been upped significantly. The familiar corvette class is now accompanied by miners, civilian yachts, smaller police vessels, and more fighter craft. The designs range from evolutions of designs from the previous games, to some that were influenced by James Cameron's *The Abyss* or Kurosawa films. To reflect the more personal storyline, the focus will be on the personal fighter ships, rather than on the massive vessels of the previous game.

Right now, the team is still banging on the engine itself, and letting bits of gameplay leak into their work. There's a lot that's being planned, but not quite implemented yet—like multiplayer, base-building, and ship customizing. Even though a few key issues are still "up in the air," I'm confident in Particle Systems; they've already taken a not-too-successful aspect of past sims (realistic physics), and crafted a great game around it. Now they're taking their physics, and adding the open-ended gameplay that's been missing since PRIVATEER. So keep an eye out for this one, come Christmas. CGW

SOME CALL IT A PIGSTY, I CALL IT HOME As you progress, you'll add even more "stuff" to your home base.



The Sims

The Sims is not a game. It's a way of life.

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

By Chris Lombardi

Welcome to t



It's lunchtime on a Friday at a grimy pub in downtown San Francisco. A pack of editors from a computer game magazine are there to order greasy burgers, ogle the beautiful bartender, and gab. So far, so normal.

But this day is not normal. It's about as far from normal as you can get without Rod Serling as your host. For where these editors usually talk games and movies and comic books in conversation thick with off-color jokes, today they're talking interior decoration, landscaping, the secrets of good housekeeping, and, egad!, *relationships*. Understand that these are guys who regularly fail to match their socks, who could learn something about social graces from the average orangutan. These "guy's guys" have suddenly transformed into Martha Stewarts and Mrs. Manners, nattering away a mile a minute, effusively gossiping about the marriage troubles of the so-and-sos, and so giddy with enthusiasm over a par-

CGW RATED ★★★★★

PROS

A breakthrough design that's entertaining and innovative on many different levels.

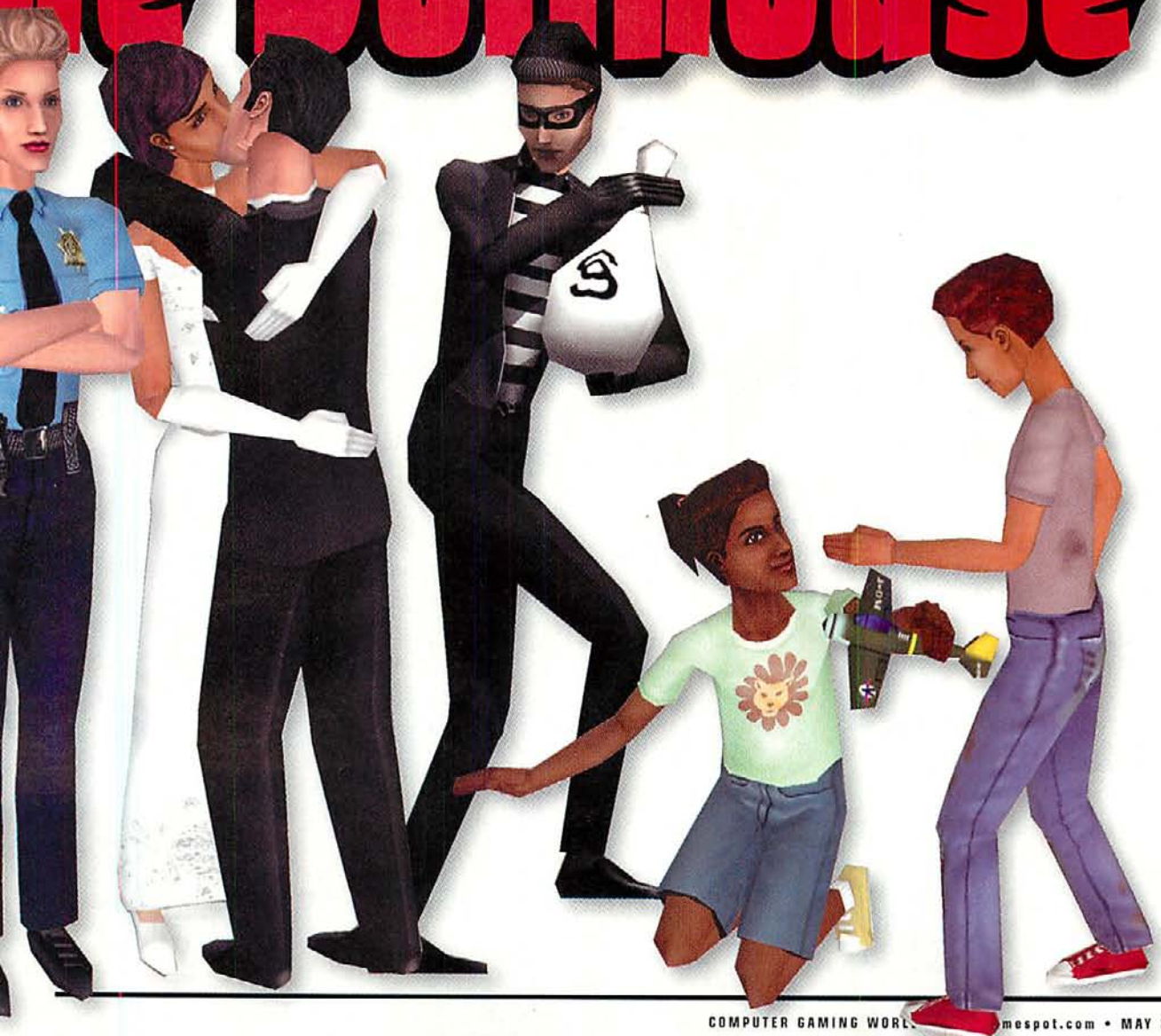
CONS

Mundane details of the Sims' lives can become just as rote and tedious as in real life. No sex!

Requirements: Pentium 233MHz, 32MB RAM, 300MB hard drive space, 4x CD-ROM.
Recommended Requirements: Pentium II, 64MB RAM.
3D Support: None **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: Electronic Arts • **Developer:** Maxis • **$40** • **www.thesims.com**
ESRB Rating: Teen; mature sexual themes, mild animated violence, comic mischief.

he Dollhouse




Winter 2000.
www.ThroneofDarkness.com
RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
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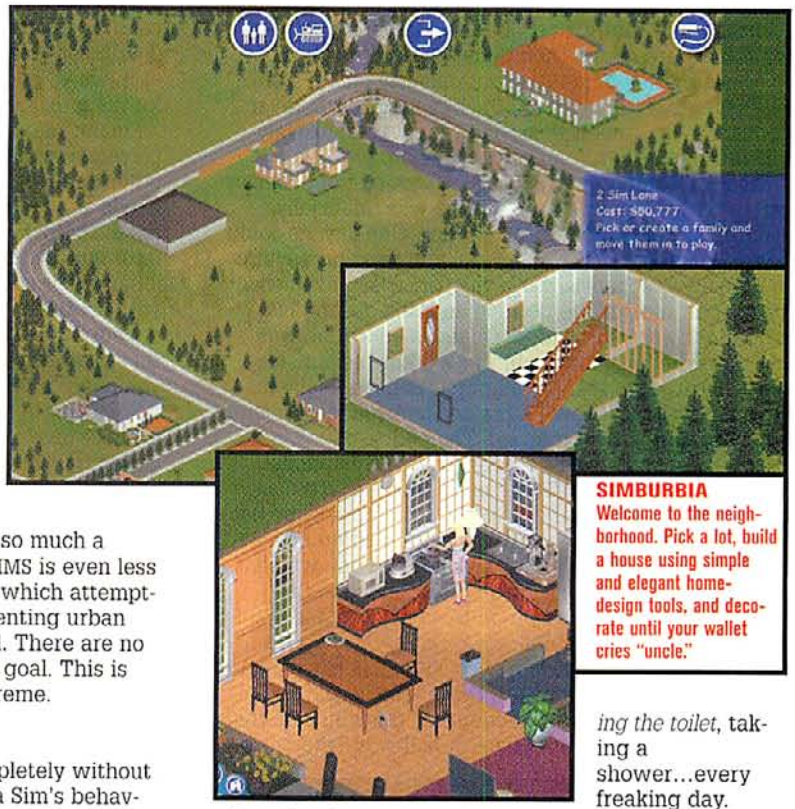
ticularly successful combination of mauve carpeting and Japanese wall coverings that they're seriously at risk of wetting themselves.

Just what the hell is going on here? Who turned the cosmos upside-down and inside out? Something wicked has surely come this way...

So Wrong, It's Wright

The name given this evil is THE SIMS, the latest brain-contagion-disguised-as-software from Will Wright and Maxis. You may remember Wright as the man who unleashed SIMCITY on an unsuspecting world in the early 90s, and whose company Maxis has subsequently riffed on the Sim theme to create titles like SIMLIFE, SIMEARTH, SIMFARM, and SIMANT, among others.

THE SIMS concept follows naturally from SIMCITY. In SIMCITY, you played the planning god of a simulated urban environment. In THE SIMS, you drop down an order of magnitude in scale and enter the homes of the Sims to play household deity, directing the day to day lives of the average Sim-on-the-street. In SIMCITY you laid out zones, created urban amenities and services, and dealt with disasters. In THE SIMS, you design a house from the slab up, using very elegant home-design tools; you furnish and decorate and help individual Sims negotiate the daily trials of life, as well as the occasional life crisis. Sims make friends, find love, have children, climb career ladders—and yes, even face death—all of which is depicted with charming animations and a rich and clever sound design.



SIMBURBIA
Welcome to the neighborhood. Pick a lot, build a house using simple and elegant home-design tools, and decorate until your wallet cries "uncle."

Like most Sim games, THE SIMS is not so much a game as a "software toy." In fact, THE SIMS is even less "gamey" than the open-ended SIMCITY, which attempted to offer game-like challenges by presenting urban crisis scenarios as problems to be solved. There are no "scenarios" in THE SIMS, and no explicit goal. This is free-form, exploratory gaming in the extreme.

Money, and How It Gets That Way

That's not to say that THE SIMS is completely without structure. Money motivates and frames a Sim's behavior. Money buys and furnishes homes; feeds Sims; pays their utility bills, their gardeners, and their maids. Sims earn cash by working at one of 10 different career paths, which range from medicine to entertainment to crime. They move up the career ladder by improving their skills (including such things as mechanical aptitude, charisma, and physical fitness), building their social network, and going to work in high spirits.

The mood of a Sim is all-important, and keeping your Sims happy is your number-one concern. The Sim's psyche is divided into nine basic needs (social, hygiene, bladder, hunger, energy, entertainment, comfort, and environmental satisfaction) that must be adequately met in order to keep a Sim grinning. The fundamental challenge of THE SIMS, as in life, is to find the time to meet all of your Sim's basic needs and still have time to boogie. Each sim day, you face questions like: Do I spend my two hours of free time tonight playing pool with my friends, or studying for a promotion? Computer games until the wee hours, or a good night's sleep? A bath tonight, or in the morning? It's the juggling act that each of us performs every single day, each in our own way and to varying degrees of success. It's life in all of its drab, humdrum detail, as well as in the little victories and achievements that make it all worthwhile.

Free Willie

The Sims are autonomous beings, to a degree. They can take care of their basic needs, but never as well as an attentive and conscientious player/caretaker. So, if you want to maximize your Sim's success in some realm, you'll need to take control, which means directing *every* action a Sim makes: going to the bathroom, flushing the toilet, washing its hands, cooking dinner, washing dishes, turning on the TV, sitting down to watch TV, turning off the TV, setting the alarm clock, going to bed, getting up, going to the bathroom, *flushing the toilet*, taking a shower...every freaking day.

Sound tedious? It certainly can be. Fortunately, success in Sim life brings some relief from the drudgery. You can hire a maid to clean up, a gardener to garden, and (halleluja!) a toilet that will flush itself. Other appliances and improved skills can reduce the amount of time spent with dirty details.

But initially, the micro-management of life's minutia is unrelenting. This, combined with some limitations, can lead to initial disappointment. A game that bills itself as a "life simulator" can't fail to disappoint to a degree, given one's intimate familiarity with the subject matter and the huge expectations one can't help but heap onto the simulation. For instance, in a life simulator, you might hope that your Sims could get out of the house, go on a date, go to the bar. But THE SIMS is centered entirely on the home. The career choices are rather limited, as is the actual effect that a career has in the simulation, the only operational difference between careers being in the wages earned and hours worked. Sims have relationships with other Sims, but the purity of Sim friendships can be tarnished by the fact that one *must* amass friends to climb up most of the career lad-

ders, reducing friends to objects that must be collected like Pokémon in order to "gain a level." Then there's the fact that the only obvious objectives are the acquisition of consumer goods and the enlarging of one's home. The sum effect is that THE SIMS can come off as an agoraphobic Yuppie simulator, without enough tasteful wallpaper and flooring combinations.

And Now, the Rest of the Story

However, such a view only skims the surface of THE SIMS. There is deeper magic coursing through this software that's not at all obvious from viewing the bare bones of the simulation. In several difference senses, THE SIMS disc that you bring home from the store contains but a small fraction of what the complete experience has to offer.

First, a very interesting thing can happen to players while they are taking their Sims through the paces of their lives: They begin to spontaneously create stories. Wherever there are gaps in the simulation, wherever details are left unspecified, one's mind compulsively fills these holes with narrative. An example:

Chumpy Lombardi, my first Sim, was on the business career path. He was successful, he was financially secure, but he was bitterly unhappy. One day, he could bear it no longer. He quit his job, and used his savings to go back to school to study his true passion: science! To support himself, he became an artist, selling his paintings to pay his tuition. Once his education was complete, he joined the ranks of working scientists, and—because he was so delighted to have finally discovered his bliss—flew up the academic ladder, eventually becoming a full professor. The end.

Now, very little of this scenario *actually* happened within the simulation. There is no "midlife crisis" module programmed into the game. You can't really go back to school. And it's really hard to tell the difference between a Sim who's found his bliss and one who has not. But the simulation provided just enough of a framework for my imagination to work upon and spontaneously weave this tale.

Everyone I know who's played THE SIMS has experienced this phenomenon, and those who've allowed themselves the greatest freedom to "think outside the box" of the simulation, to meet it half-way with one's imagination in full gear, seem to be enjoying the game the most. THE SIMS is designed such that the more imagination you bring to it, and the more you are willing to explore and push beyond its apparent limits, the more you get out of it.

The second sense in which THE SIMS is more than it appears is that the game you buy off the shelf offers just a slim percentage of the household objects, characters, and home-decorating options available. The Maxis team was clever enough to realize that they could not provide everything that people might want in THE SIMS. So, they've given players the tools and support they need to create new elements. As I write, the game has been out for just three weeks, and already there are hundreds of new character "skins" available, ranging from Frankenstein to The Flash to the entire KISS band, in addition to thousands of new wallpaper and flooring options. Maxis itself is releasing a new object each week, and plans to continue releasing one a week for the foreseeable future.

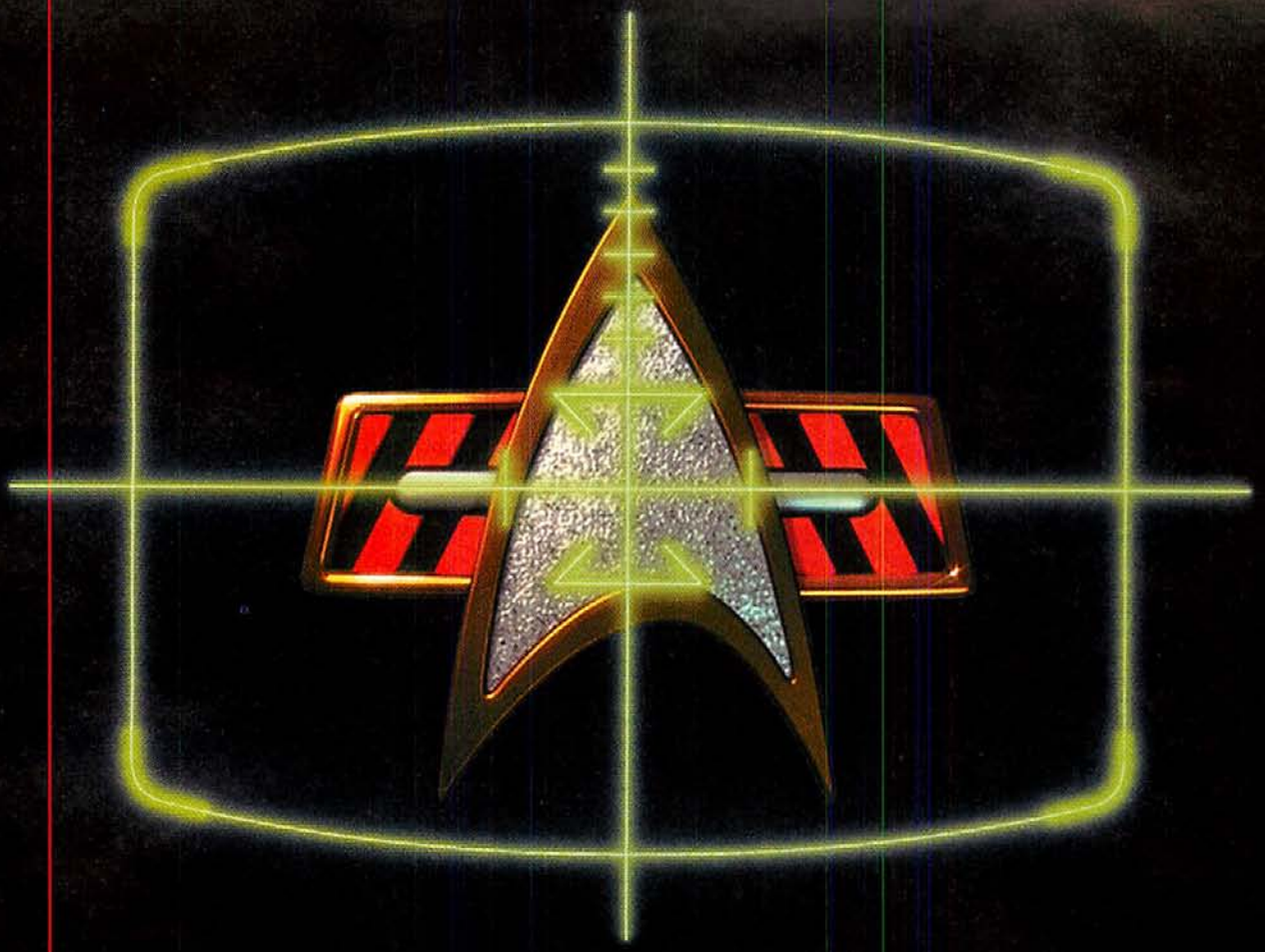
Finally, Maxis' Web site, www.thesims.com, offers players a whole meta-level of social interaction with other *real* people. Players can upload their neighborhoods and families to the Web site and download others to compare and contrast their efforts. By far, the most interesting component of the site is the "photo albums," assemblages of screenshots from the game with captions. Players have been using this tool to create surprisingly good graphic novels of sorts about their Sims families. They're worth checking out, even if you're not into the game.

So, if you're able to engage THE SIMS at one or more of these levels, it's a totally addicting, fascinating, charming, and—in small and unexpected ways—enlightening experience. It's remarkable how one's life and personality can be mirrored by the game, and how the game can show you your own life from fresh angles (I know I'll never look at my co-workers in quite the same way). That a piece of entertainment software is capable of evoking so much from its players is rare and praiseworthy. But when one considers THE SIMS' other achievements—among them, vigorously affirming the commercial viability of non-competitive games, enlisting players as co-creators at an unprecedented level, offering long-term support and extension of the game universe (for free), and, perhaps above all, getting gamers to think about things like hygiene, nutrition, and a good night's sleep (not that it's had any real effect around *CGW*)—one realizes that what we have in THE SIMS is an Important Game, one of those rarities—a SIMCITY, a DOOM, a HALF-LIFE—that will make an indelible mark on our hobby. Such games only come around once in a while, and shouldn't be missed. CGW

THE SOCIAL SIM

The range of Sim social behaviors is quite broad: dancing, insults, jokes, slaps, and all sorts of huggin', touchin,' and squeezin' – with the exception of sex. The social component is extremely well designed, with intricate gestures and body language, iconic speech balloons (see hot tub shot) that suggest the Sims' topics of conversation, and an audio pseudo-language.





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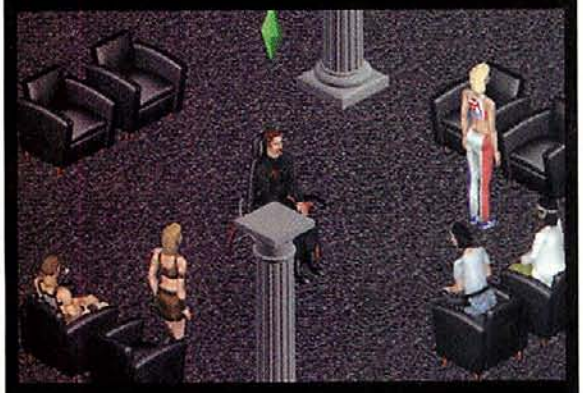
TEEN T Animated Violence

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THE SIMS: Sick & Twisted



Here's a small sampling of the weirdness to be found in the online photo albums at www.thesims.com. 1) Mr. Sadistic (the naked one on the bench) keeps Sims as pets...



2) A scene from inside the compound of a Sim cult...



3) The "command center" of an evil genius plotting world destruction...



4) Things take a turn toward the tragic in the life of Grizzley Adams; shot by the deputy, he lies bleeding while faithful companion Tan-Bear grieves (note: the image was doctored to add the blood. There's no bloody violence in THE SIMS...yet).

Good Will Gaming

An Interview With Gaming's Great Constructor, Will Wright

"Klapaucius is my hero," says Will Wright, the designer of SIMCITY and THE SIMS. Klapaucius, Wright explains, is the protagonist in a series of stories by Polish science-fiction author and mathematician Stanislaw Lem. A robotic demi-god in the far future, a Great Constructor with the power to move stars and construct impossible contraptions, Klapaucius roams the universe, looking for fresh ways to put his construction skills to the test, and at the same time humble the proud, disarm the war-like, and explore knotty issues like free will, information theory, and the nature of consciousness.

When we visited Wright in his cramped, windowless office, he looked the perfect human analog of his robotic hero. On his computer screen, he was browsing the recent photo albums uploaded to www.thesims.com like a deity amusing himself with the antics of his creations. On his desk, he toyed with the prototype of a plastic home construction set which he designed (whether the kit becomes a children's toy or a architectural space-planning tool, he's not yet sure). Just outside his office is a romper room filled with toys, among them a model railroad. One gets the impression that, for Wright, a day without creating something is not a complete day.



I'm in a very rare and special position today from the perspective of the Sims, in that I have an audience with their creator. I suppose the Sims would want me to ask something like, "What's the meaning of SimLife?"

There's a short story by Stanislaw Lem about some programmers who create a virtual world like THE SIMS. And there's a debate among the creators of this world about whether or not they should tell these simulated people that they just live inside a computer and that they created them. Eventually a law is passed that says they're not allowed to tell the simulated people anything; it's considered unethical. But these people deduce that there are creators watching them, they notice that information is leaking out of their environment and coming back in with feedback, so obviously someone is

changing the environment based on what they're doing. Anyway, the moral implication of all that is pretty interesting and I'll just leave it at that.

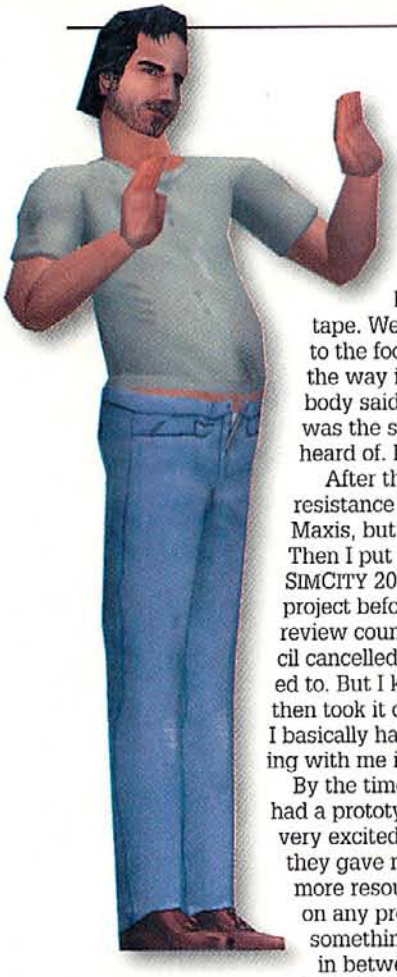
You obviously had to make many difficult ethical choices and deal with lots of sensitive issues in creating a game about life.

Oh yeah. We had a whole list that we had to thread through quite carefully. We had long discussions about each one. Homosexuality. Domestic violence. Child abuse. Pedophilia. All these touchy things. With each one, we tried to figure out just how far we could go without upsetting too many people, but keeping the game as open-ended as possible. It was all about that balance. There were a couple things that we decided we just didn't want to touch, like pedophilia. Others we decided we were fairly comfortable with, like homosexuality. Other things we tried to leave open to interpretation.

The domestic violence issue was an interesting one. One of the social interactions is a slap. Our initial slap was a "knock your head off" kind of slap. It was fine, except when you saw a husband slapping his wife; it was a "break your jaw" kind of slap, and a lot of people were uncomfortable with that—it was just too gritty and realistic. So we ended up doing two slaps: If a man and women are slapping, it's much more of a British officer's-dueling slap. But if it's a woman to woman or man to man slap, it's the more violent slap. So there were things we had to fine-tune to skirt around some of these issues.

THE SIMS is a pretty big break from traditional game designs. Did you have any trouble getting support for the idea?





Oh yeah. I started on this seven years ago. Before SIMCITY 2000. And a lot of people thought it was iffy. In 1993, the marketing people wanted to do a focus group, which was hilarious. I still have it on tape. We described the concept to the focus group almost exactly the way it shipped, and everybody said they hated it, that it was the stupidest idea they'd ever heard of. It was classic.

After that, there was a lot of resistance to the idea within Maxis, but I kept fighting for it. Then I put down the project to do SIMCITY 2000. In 1995, we put the project before our internal product-review council, and the review council cancelled the project. Or attempted to. But I kinda raised a stink and then took it over as my secret project. I basically had one programmer working with me in the background.

By the time EA bought Maxis, we had a prototype running. EA was very excited about the project and they gave me three or four times more resources than I've ever had on any project. EA either does something, or doesn't, there's no in between. It was just amazing how many resources we could apply to THE SIMS over the past two years.

I find the reactions that people have to THE SIMS to be fascinating. Some absolutely hate it, and for some it's a new religion.

Yeah, THE SIMS is like this weird mirror. Two out of ten people find the game to be incredibly boring. Another two think it's okay. And the other six love it. It's interesting just how bipolar the reaction can be. It has a lot to do with how much people allow the game to reflect their own lives, and how much imagination they're willing to put into the game.

In a lot of games, you can be very imaginative and the game just rejects it. So I can see how someone could get very attuned to that, not expecting to be able to bring in their own imagination. They're waiting to see the next cut scene, and thinking "Whoa, there's no cool cut-scene here, what am I supposed to do? This is work!"

Why is the game able to evoke such a strong response from those six of ten?

Well, the essence of worlds like SIMCITY and THE SIMS is up here [in your head], not here [in the computer]. The most detailed representation and simulation of that world is what the players carry around with them. So the computer models are really just a tool to spark the model in your head; the game supplies the dynamics, but it's your head that fills in the details. There's a space between the computer model and the brain's model where this thing actually lives. The computer is good at certain things that prop up the simulation; the human is good at other things—so the human is actually actively simulating the things that the computer is very bad at simulating.

The original SIMCITY had a pretty profound impact on gaming. After SIMCITY, many games started to incorporate SIMCITY-like elements into their designs. What do you think THE SIMS' impact will be? What elements of the game might people incorporate into their designs?

I wouldn't be surprised to see the speech presentation used again—the way we communicate the emotions and topic, but not the details. One thing people haven't mentioned that we thought was quite innovative was the use of the pie menus for the social interactions. But really, there's nothing we're doing here that's that remarkable, except for perhaps the architecture of our simulation; its object-oriented nature is quite innovative.

The biggest impact though is that you'll have all the good, creative designers out there who might have had ideas in this direction who will now be able to get publishers to support them. I'm sure there are plenty of people out there who had similar ideas, but could never sell the idea in a million years. If THE SIMS is a market success, it'll be much easier for them to get their projects greenlighted. So I think we might see a lot more games that involve social interaction. That's the effect of an innovative game that's a commercial success—it makes a new design space safe for game designers to explore.

THE SIMS seems a natural for an online world with thousands of people interacting.

There are a lot of multiplayer ideas that sound good in the abstract, but as you dig into the specifics, there's hard problems to be overcome. We're working on a multiplayer world, but right now we're working down at the level of identifying little problems that pop up that don't seem obvious at the high level. Designing is kind of like playing a game, in that you have all these potential paths you can take, and a lot of times you're going to go down branches that are wrong. What we're trying to do is prune the branches of potential multiplayer designs as quickly as possible. I have an instinct for where it might go, and based on that instinct we've built a prototype.

Are you thinking large-scale?

Depends on your definition of large. I'm thinking 100,000 players.

In a single world?

Depends on what you mean by single world. This could change at any time, but right now we're thinking of a design that appears to be a persistent world. But you'd play one house at a time. You can choose which house you want to go to, but you're then in that house's environment. It's not like a free-form world where you could walk up and down the streets. And we're not going to force people to just do a house. It could be a lounge or a bar or a business, whatever they want.

Will there be an economy?

Right now we're looking at more than one project. The first project will not have a secure economy. We can have a secure economy—and in fact we're going to, in a later version—but that would add about a year to the project. So, we decided we want to come out a year earlier with a design that works without a secure economy, and instead let people role-play and interact and make it all about social interaction.

In the future version, I'd like to base the economic model on creativity, so that people are encouraged and rewarded for entertaining the other players—whether it's creating cool skins, or objects, or a house. I'm not sure how we're going to accomplish this yet, it's just a gut

feeling as to where I think we should be going with it.

Tell us a little more about the object architecture.

Almost all of the behaviors in the game are inside the objects, which is how we're able to extend the behavior just by downloading an object. All the Sims know is that objects can help meet certain needs; they know "I'm hungry" and they look for the highest scoring hunger item; at that point they start running code in the object, say, the refrigerator. The refrigerator actually contains the animation and sound effects and the computer code that allows them to eat, including cooking and finding a chair and table. So that way, with downloadable objects, we can totally change the behavior and add new layers of simulation on top of them.

Have any of your recent downloadable objects done something like that?

We've done a little. Our next download is a guinea pig. People can take it out of its cage and pet it and play with it. But it's kind of a Trojan Horse object. If the guinea pig bites you, you'll actually get sick. But you won't notice this for maybe a day. You'll start seeing the Sim sneeze, then cough. And it's a communicable disease, so they can spread it around to other sims. If you don't get enough rest, you'll eventually die. So there's this whole new dynamic—sickness—that we've added to the game with just one object.

So you're going to be adding more ways for Sims to die?

Oh yeah. People really seem to be enjoying that. One thing I'm doing is looking at the stories on the Web site—the direction that people are trying to go in with the stories and hitting brick walls. I want to look at those brick walls and figure out how to remove them with downloadable objects. The real long-term attraction of THE SIMS is as a story-telling platform, so we're giving players new props that they can use on their stage.

How long will you support the game?

We're not sure. In the long term, we want to transition from us creating the stuff to the players creating the stuff. We've got a lot of very hard-to-use tools right now for creating objects. Creating objects is a very complex process. But I'm still convinced that I want to give these tools to the players. They won't be useful to the average player, but there are some people out there that can figure this out and do it. So at some point, we'll be ramping these skilled fans up so that we can start ramping down our efforts, and then get on to the next version of the game. CGW





The Sims

The Habits of Highly Effective Sims

Tips for Making the Most out of Sim Life

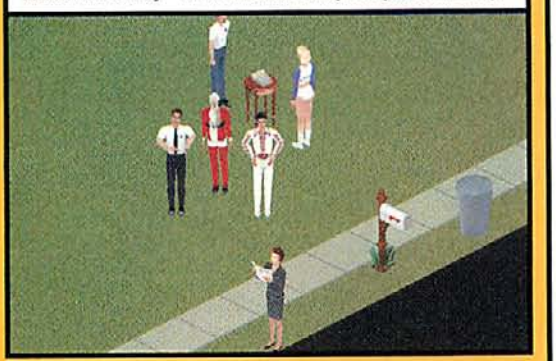
Relationships

▪ **Go a'Calling.** You don't have to wait for your friends to come to you. You can go to them. Go to the neighborhood selector and choose another house. Then call up the Sim you are working on and invite him or her over. Then, bombard the Sim with social options. This works great with large families. The Sim you've invited can interact with three or four other Sims and boost his relationship rating. An extra bonus to this technique is that it doesn't cost the Sim any time or energy. When you go back to the original Sim's house, no time will have passed.

▪ **Instant Friends.** If your Sim is in dire need of new friends, create a large family of new Sims and move them onto a lot. You don't have to worry about completely outfitting a new house, or building any house at all. Just give them a phone. Without a phone, you can't call the new Sims and invite them over.

▪ **Relationships With Kids.** Having good relationships with neighborhood kids can be tough for the working adult due to the narrow window of social time between school hours and the eight o'clock curfew. But there's a way around this. If a kid is visiting and the kid's parent comes over to collect the kid, ignore the parent. Don't answer the door and keep the kid occupied. Eventually, the parent will go away and you can keep the kid well past midnight.

ELVIS IS A FRIEND OF MINE If you need lots of new friends fast, create a huge family, plop them on a plot of land, and give them a phone (and no jobs!). Here, we have a family consisting of Santa, Elvis, Will Wright, a Dallas Cowboy cheerleader, and agents Mulder and Sculley – all of whom are now just a phone call away.



"Me" Time

▪ **Divide and conquer your Sims' needs.** Don't try to satisfy all of the needs every day. We've found it useful to set up a 3-4 day schedule that focuses on one need each day. So, we have a Study Day, a Take Care of Personal Crap Day, a Fun Day, a Social Day, followed by a day off. Adjust this schedule according to your Sim's personality.

▪ **A fine day off.** Early in THE SIMS it's going to be hard to address all your Sim's needs, especially social needs. There just never seems to be enough hours in the day, and the economic constraints you face early in the game keep you from efficiently doing much of anything. The key is to take occasional days off of work; but instead of just lying around—like you do when dodging work in real life—you need to make your days off work for you.

Once you have some money in the bank, turn off "Free Will" in the Options menu and take over your Sim's life entirely. Once he/she gets up, ignore the carpool and binge on food, gorging yourself silly. Take a couple of showers; eat some more; then watch tons of TV to shoot your Fun rating up. Take a long nap after lunch so you're well rested and comfortable. Right before the rest of the neighborhood gets off from work (generally around 3:00 p.m.), eat some more, then call everyone you know over for a big party. Use the toilet before they show up, whether you need to or not. Once everyone arrives, prepare a meal so they can eat, then talk to everyone as long as you can—talking is the big Social activity. If you've timed everything out right, you'll be able to stay up late and socialize for a while with no ill effects. You can supplement your new, high Social rating by having individual guests drop by most every evening until your next party.

Good Housekeeping

▪ **Do not disturb.** Getting a Sim woken up in the middle of the night by a phone call or noise from a TV or radio can be disastrous to the following day. To ensure peace and quiet at night, make sure that all of the passageways into the Sim's sleeping area have either a door or a doorframe. Doors and doorframes block out all noise from other rooms, ensuring a good night's sleep.

▪ **Invest in comfort.** The most important furnishings in a Sim's life: bed, toilet, bath, and couch. When starting out, keep your house small and buy the highest quality models of these items you can. The

In the Kitchen

• **Get cooking!** Cooking is a very important skill, as it reduces the amount of time you'll spend feeding yourself. When starting a new bachelor Sim, it's a good idea to immediately study cooking, even before you get a job. It will save you lots of time in the long run, and reduce the risk of fire.

• **Fire bad!** If you're cooking skills are weak, for God's sake: **DON'T USE THE RANGE.** Fires are frighteningly frequent when you're a rookie chef. When starting a new Sim, it's best to avoid a range/stove altogether. You can get by just fine with a food processor and a microwave, although there is still some risk of fire with the latter.

• **Plan your kitchen for maximum efficiency.** Try to set up your various appliances so that Sims can proceed from one to another in a straight line.

COOKING FOR ONE Here's a simple but efficient bachelor kitchen setup. From frig to food processor is one step. Then the Sim need only turn to the left to reach the microwave. Notice how the trash compactor serves as a counter top, and that there is no stove in sight.



• **Binge eating.** For those times you need to get a lot of food in you, Serve Dinner instead of making a series of single meals. It costs $20 (twice the cost of a single dinner) but provides about five or six plates of food, regardless of the fact that no one else is around. This way, you can just eat and eat and eat without wasting time repeatedly preparing food—more time to socialize when you call friends over later.

• **Do your Sim's dirty work.** While in Build mode, you can move any object that's not currently in use. You can use this ability to do lots of micro-management. For instance, before you can afford a maid, you can help your Sims with clean up. Gather all of the dishes and stack them next to the sink. Or gather trash and place it next to a trash can. If you're really cheap and lazy, you can create a garbage pit at the side of your house where you can throw your trash.



investment will pay off hand-over-fist in your Sim's energy, comfort, and hygiene levels.

CURBSIDE KICKS Yeah, the fish tank on the front lawn looks funny. But the "fun" boost you'll get, just before carpool, could give you the edge you need to get your next promotion.



▪ **Paying bills is a pain in the butt.** So you may as well spend as little time as possible doing it. Rather than having your Sims tote the mail all the way into the house and then back out to the mailbox, try this trick: Place a tasteful little end-table in your front yard, as close to the mailbox as possible. The Sim will then place the bills on the end-table. It may look funny, but it will allow you to pay your bills very quickly when you are either coming home or going to work. If you'd rather not have furniture on the front lawn, have your Sim get the mail and then immediately cancel the action. The Sim will drop the mail at his feet. You can also place a fish tank next to the table, so that your Sim can get a quick "fun" boost right before stepping into the carpool car.

▪ **Hot tub hot!** Hot tubs are one of the best luxuries in the game. They improve hygiene and comfort, and they are a great social activity. Highly social Sims swear by the hot tub.

GOTCHA! The exterior burglar alarm is sounding even before the thief has stepped through your door. He'll get caught, and you'll get a reward – without losing a single cent to the insurance company.



▪ **Burglars.** Put a burglar alarm on the outside of your house near the main entry. The range of the burglar alarm is "the room it's currently in," and the exterior of your house is considered a room. As soon as a burglar steps onto your property, the alarm will sound and the police will catch him before he has a chance to take anything. You earn the reward for capture without having to pay to replace any stolen goods.

▪ **Don't neglect the front lawn.** Many players tend to ignore the outsides of their homes, to the detriment of their "room" rating. As soon as you can afford it, hire a gardener and then go wild with the flora. Don't bother planting before you can afford help; the time needed to care for plants is not worth the benefit.

The Working World

▪ **Match your Sim's career and personality.** Certain personalities are better suited to certain careers. Highly social careers like business and politics require high "outgoing" and "nice" ratings to win friends and influence others. Physical jobs like athlete and daredevil are nearly impossible without a high "active" rating.

▪ **Take a sabbatical.** If you find that you're having trouble advancing in your career due to social or skill limitations, and you have a fat savings account, go on "sabbatical." Quit your job and start working on your skills and/or social life. In just a week or two, you can max out your important stats and have a truck-load of friends. Then, get another job and giggle with glee as you soar up the corporate ladder.

I Want My MP3s!

Want to listen to different music on the Sim's stereo? Just drop your favorite MP3 files into either the Latin, Country, Rock, or Classical folders in the "TheSims\Music\Stations\" directory. You can also change the music that plays during the Build and Buy modes (\Music\Modes) as well as the sounds coming from the TV (\SoundData\TVStations\).

Damn Your Cheatin' Heart

While in live mode, press [Ctrl] + [Shift] + [Alt] + [C] to display a box in the upper-left corner of the screen. Type in the codes below to activate the cheat.

CODE	EFFECT
Klapaucius	Gives you 1000 Simoleons.
water_tool	Even the SimSlacker can afford waterfront property with the water tool. Input this code and your cursor becomes a water drawing tool. Be warned: once a water tile, always a water tile.
interests	Allows you to view your Sim's conversational interests.
autonomy [1-100]	This cheat allows you to change your Sim's level of free will. Set to 0, your Sim will just stand there waiting for your commands. Set to 100, the Sims do a good job of meeting their own basic needs. Useful for when you want to put your Sim on a work-a-holic binge in order to rack up the Simoleons.
set_hour [1-24]	If only life had this cheat. If you want to give your Sim an extra hour or two of sleep, use this cheat to set back the clock.



NO SIM IS AN ISLAND But with the "water tool" cheat, a Sim can live on a lovely peninsula.

▪ **Be an artist.** There's at least one way to make a living without having a "career." With a maxed-out Creativity skill, a Sim can sell paintings at $166 a pop. A Sim can create 1.5 paintings a day, on average. It's not going to make you rich (what did you expect?), but you can get by while living an "alternative lifestyle." CGW

Might and Magic®

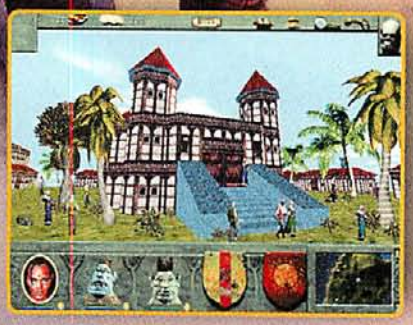
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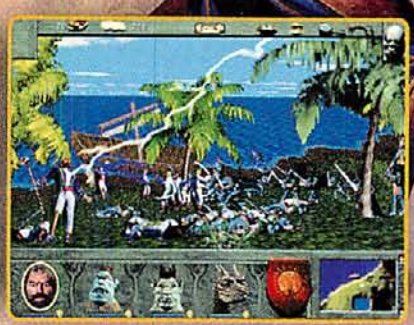
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FLIGHT & FLIGHT ON

Embattled Flight Sim Genre Stakes Its Future

By Gordon Berg and John Nolan

It comes as a shock to no one that retail flight sims are the latest poster child for a genre in trouble. In fact, most investors consider the funding of a new flight simulation in today's gaming climate to be the equivalent of financial suicide. But mention the terms "Internet" and "multiplayer" and an investor's eyes light up with dollar signs, like a character in a Saturday-morning cartoon.

This might go a long way in explaining why there are already six online sims based on the WWII era (with a possible seventh on the way) competing for your time and money. While we're at it, throw in a couple of WWI sims and a Vietnam-based effort as well. It seems the Internet has taken what was once known as the most obscure of niche markets—the online flight sim—and has turned it into a hotbed of frenzied gaming development.

If you haven't tried multiplayer flying yet, you're missing out on some of the best fun you can have online. Now's the time to give it a try, because you have more options than ever before.

WWII Online

Flight Plan: The "Electronic Battlefield" has long been a Holy Grail of sorts for the online sim enthusiast—intensely desired, but impossible to find. So when 15 employees left the now-defunct iMagic office in Grapevine, TX to form Playnet Inc./Cornered Rat Software, they asked themselves, "Why not us?" As the title implies, WWII ONLINE is going to be more than just a flight sim. Those of you who've long craved a grander strategic model than simply capturing an airfield just might get your wish. In fact, you're going to get an entire war, where you can do more than fly: You can drive tanks, captain ships, or even grunt it out as a soldier on foot, as in a first-person shooter. Successful mission completion gives your persona the ability to climb the ranking system, giving you access to more resources and better equipment. Do well enough, and you could earn a trusted command position in one of various branches of a service. Or, you can screw all of that and occasionally pop in just to blow stuff up. WWII ONLINE will be broken up into various theaters. Each theater can accommodate up to 1000 players, and eventually a total of ten theaters will be made available (Russia, North Africa, South Pacific, and so on).

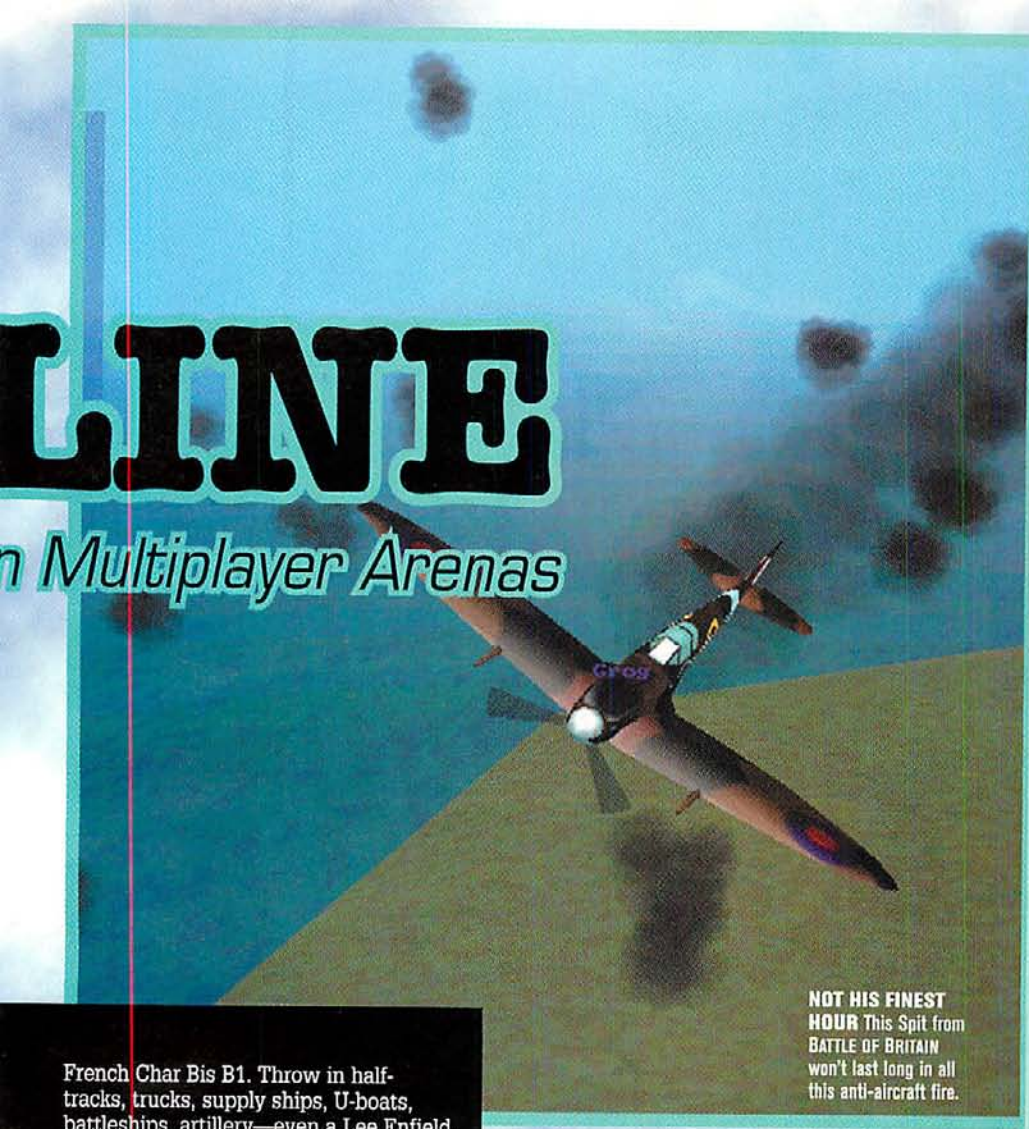
Choose Your Weapon: The first theater will be based on the Blitzkrieg of 1940, and equipment will reflect that period. The usual suspects will be there—the Spit, Hurricane, and assorted Messerschmitts. There will also be other planes, like the Stuka and the French Curtis Hawk H-75. For those who prefer to drive, there'll be plenty of the early Panzer tanks to choose from, or the



FLY-BY Unlike nearly every other title in the works, WWII ONLINE will let you take on the role of ground forces, including tanks and infantry.

LINE

n Multiplayer Arenas



NOT HIS FINEST HOUR This Spit from BATTLE OF BRITAIN won't last long in all this anti-aircraft fire.

French Char Bis B1. Throw in half-tracks, trucks, supply ships, U-boats, battleships, artillery—even a Lee Enfield rifle—and you start to get the picture.

Targets of Opportunity: Continuous successful operations against the enemy will be vital, such as the capture and control of key centers of production and transportation. Players will come and go online as they please, obviously, so the teams that manage to work together by communicating and developing plans will fare best. Ultimately, though, the designers intend to accommodate all manner of play-styles into one giant, dynamic environment.

Angle of Attack: WWII ONLINE's ambitious design is endeavoring to create a world where WARBIRDS meets PANZER ELITE meets HIDDEN & DANGEROUS. The thinking is that there are hundreds of isolated communities out there right now, enjoying various forms of WWII simulation/gaming. What if all were somehow brought together into one giant game?

Ready for Takeoff: An open beta should start before the end of the second quarter of this year, followed by the production release sometime in the third quarter. Pricing is yet to be determined, but will be a flat rate.
www.wwiionline.com

Aces High

ACES HIGH, a new sim by the guys who developed WARBIRDS, offers 15 WWII planes in a three-country furball arena. Check out this month's review on page 96.



DEATH FROM ABOVE If you want to live, you've got to use those instruments, so they *must* be readable. If you want to kill, you need detail at long range to line up your target. ACES HIGH does a good job in both areas.

Battle of Britain

Flight Plan: SimGuild, a two-man operation in Oklahoma, made their mark with the WWI-based FLYING CIRCUS. Now they've set out to deliver the same unique brand of gameplay in a WWII setting: the famed Battle of Britain. Their new title, named after the historic battle, is an intentional mix of uncompromising realism and concession to play-balance, all based on what the developers think works best in a "mondo-player" arena. For example, BOB exhibits some extremely precise flight and damage modeling, so the original tactics that carried the day over the coasts of England work just as well here. On the other hand, you won't experience any blackouts; the takeoffs and landings are user-friendly; and the low-speed handling is a tad more forgiving than in other online sims. All of this makes for some quick and frenzied dogfights.

Choose Your Weapon: Five fighter aircraft are already in place, and bombers are soon to follow. Take to the skies in the legendary British Spitfire Mk 1 or Mk 1B, or try the workhorse Hurricane Mk 1. For the Luftwaffe, fly the twin-engine Bf 110 or the infamous Bf 109 (E4).

Targets of Opportunity: A single arena, with the English Channel as the obvious focal point. Hosted historical scenarios are soon to come.

Angle of Attack: BOB is geared toward the quick-fix dogfighter who usually wants to spend no more than an hour or two online, per session.

Ready for Takeoff: At the time of this writing, BOB was in beta format, and available only to SimGuild customers. Compared to the competition, the pricing is mid-range: $10/month for 40 hours. Once past the 40, it's 25¢/hr.
www.simguild.com



I MEANT A BUD LITE! The terrain and aircraft are blurry, dark, and gloomy in FIGHTER ACE II. Of course, a good burst of cannon fire can lighten the mood.

Fighter Ace II

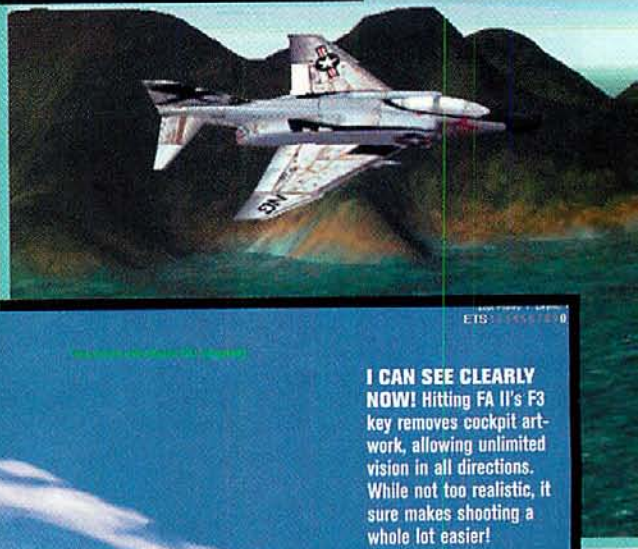
Flight Plan: FIGHTER ACE II (FA II) from Microsoft Games improves the original uninspired program by adding new aircraft, 3D-graphics support, "Territorial Combat" arenas, and more special events. New planes are always welcome, but the vast majority of FA II players use the Arcade Arenas, where "the laws of physics are not strictly enforced." As a result, the aircraft all "fly" pretty much alike, with weapons packages providing the main contrast. There is a much better flight model available in the "Realistic" arenas, yet few players choose that option. The new 3D graphics still can't match those in similar games, although they're far better than the previous version. The overall "muddy" color palette and indistinct artwork just doesn't provide that "you are there" feeling. On a brighter note, the Territorial arenas are a major enhancement to gameplay; capturing enemy assets affords relief from the endless furballs of the original FIGHTER ACE. The increased emphasis on special historical missions and tournaments also brings greater interest and a sense of community to this version.

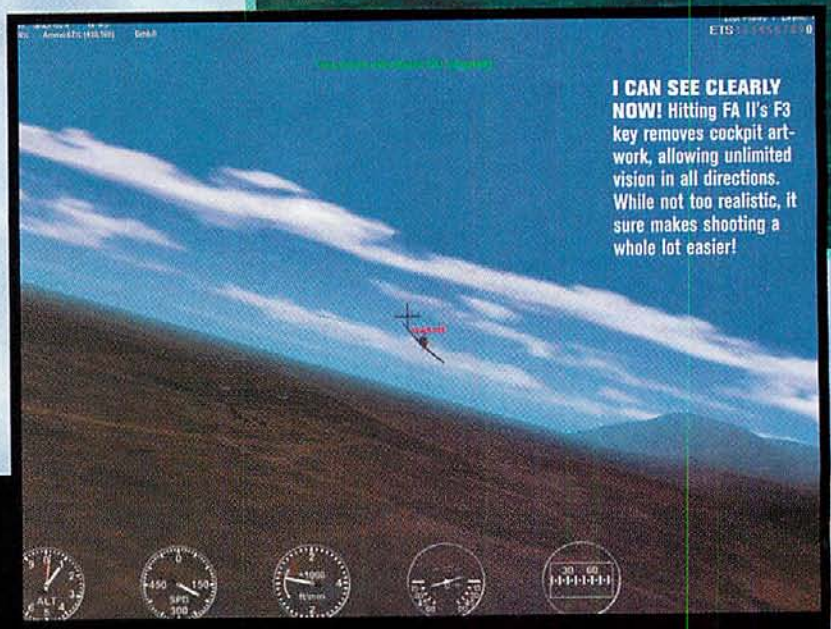
Choose Your Weapon: Fly 35 famous WWII fighter and bomber aircraft from U.S., British, German, Japanese, and Russian factories.

Targets of Opportunity: FA II offers typical online combat opportunities with "arcade," "capture the flag," Special Events, and tournament arenas.

Angle of Attack: Aimed at less-demanding pilots, this is simplified air combat with features like removable cockpit art and padlock views that are banned in other online sims.

Ready for Takeoff: FA II is up and flying at www.zone.com/fighterace for $1.95 per day, or $9.95 per month. www.zone.com





I CAN SEE CLEARLY NOW! Hitting FA II's F3 key removes cockpit artwork, allowing unlimited vision in all directions. While not too realistic, it sure makes shooting a whole lot easier!

Air Warrior: Vietnam

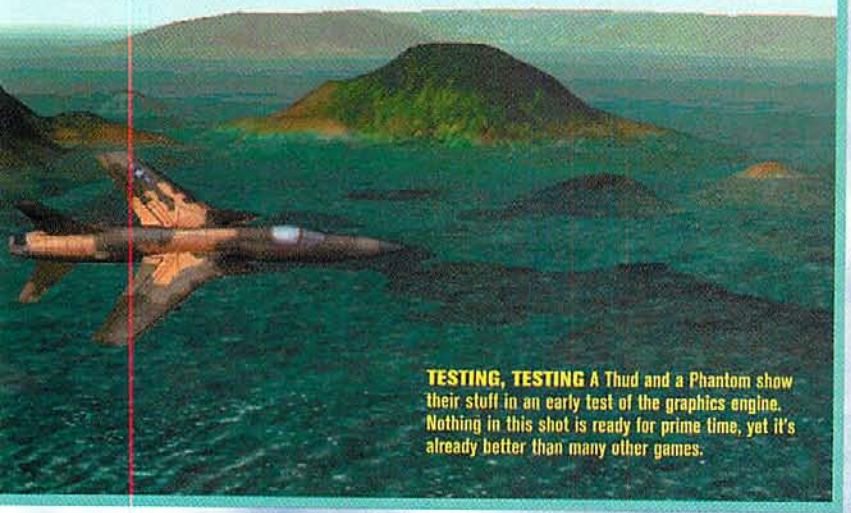
Flight Plan: Work continues at Kesmai for an assault on the Vietnam-era combat sim market. AIR WARRIOR: VIETNAM features missions and campaigns from the 1964-1968 period. Flight models will use recently declassified "official" sources for aircraft performance and handling characteristics. Both "relaxed" and "full realism" options are planned, along with all-new 3D graphics and AI modeling. Given the public attention to this war, a well-executed AIR WARRIOR: VIETNAM could revitalize interest in this era's air combat.

Choose Your Weapon: U.S. Navy: A-4, A-6, F-8, F-4. U.S. Air Force: F-4D, F-105. Vietnamese People's Air Force: MiG-17, MiG-21.

Targets of Opportunity: Gameplay features 13 campaigns covering different phases of the four-year period. While blowing stuff up is always fun, there are major political considerations in this war. You'll start with the initial bombing raids against the North, continuing towards Hanoi with the MiGs, the AAA, and SAMS getting tougher as you go. Players/pilots try to gain rank and earn medals in both the solo and online modes. The "team" goal is to make the other guy die for his country, while achieving the politicians' war aims. Online opportunities will be similar to AIR WARRIOR, with free-for-all and historical arenas.

Angle of Attack: AIR WARRIOR: VIETNAM aspires to provide a great solo game *and* an exciting massively-multiplayer online game on the same CD.

Ready for Takeoff: Kesmai declined comment on a release date, but noted that development began in early 1999. Price was also unavailable at press time, but the box set "will be typically priced" and plans include "a monthly fee for unlimited play online." www.kesmai.com.



TESTING, TESTING A Thud and a Phantom show their stuff in an early test of the graphics engine. Nothing in this shot is ready for prime time, yet it's already better than many other games.

Can't Name Names, but...

We do have one more WWII online-only flight sim to report on, but we can't tell you what it is yet. We can tell you that it's being made by a well-known sim developer, and there are plans to go beyond what is standard in many of today's online sims. In addition to user-created missions and AI-controlled enemies and friendlies, there will eventually be a dynamic campaign online, so that missions can be generated by the campaign engine itself. You'll start up your campaign and fly it through with 100+ people on both sides, fighting it out at the same time.

Finally, there might be one retail boxed product that overshadows all of the online ones: What if you could set up your own persistent server that allowed dynamic joining and leaving? Last E3, this was what Looking Glass Studios' Constantine Hanztopoulos promised that FLIGHT COMBAT: THUNDER OVER EUROPE would achieve. Since then, Electronic Arts has slapped the Jane's tag on the project, altered some of the feature set, and re-christened it ATTACK SQUADRON. EA has been tight-lipped on the design changes, so we don't know if the previously reported multiplayer options have remained intact or not. But, given EA's desire to get more mileage out of its Jane's titles, a persistent online arena seems a logical place to do just that. We'll keep you posted. *–Gordon Berg*

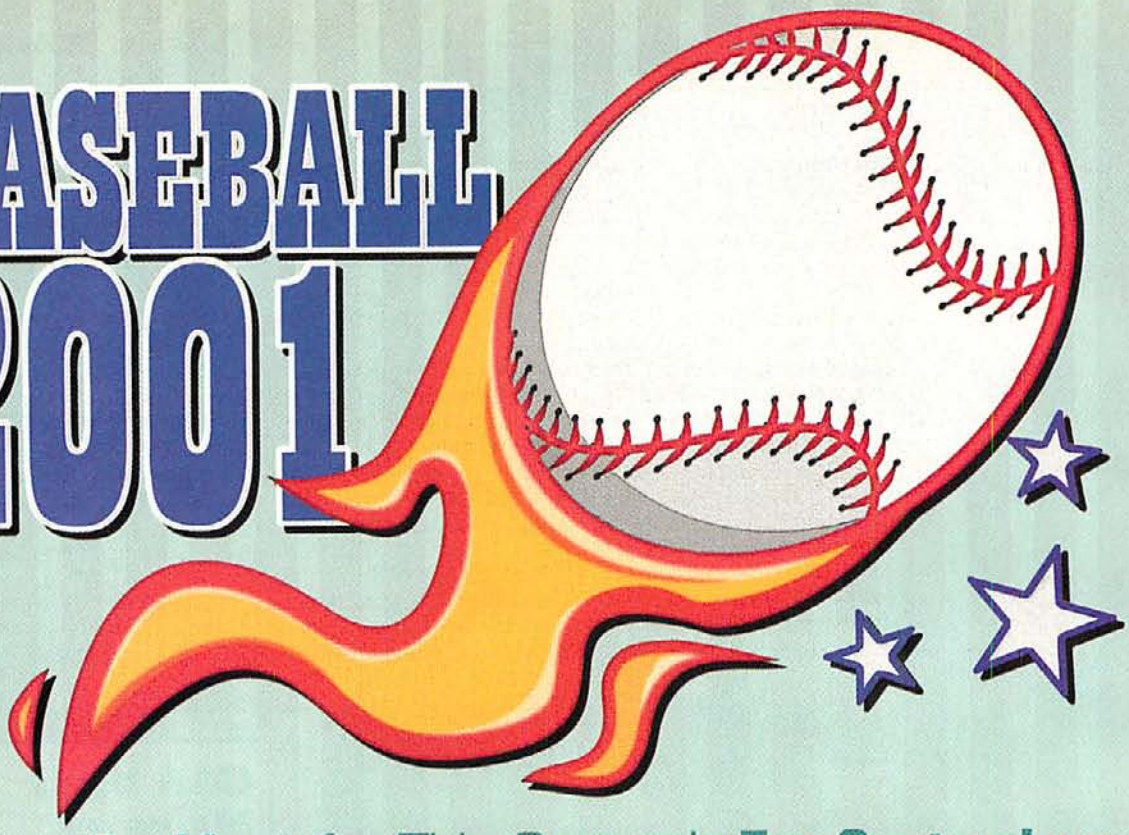
Old War Horses

WARBIRDS, from iEntertainment, remains the leader in online ACM. Its excellent 3D graphics and sophisticated flight models set the standard. The latest improvements include a refined damage model, fresh terrain, and the B-24 bomber. An all-new version in development, WARBIRDS 3.0, will raise the bar higher still. The flaw is the price; the cheapest plan costs $1.50 per hour, and many a WB ace gets hit with a huge three-digit bill for flying time.

DAWN OF ACES, iEntertainment's WWI stable mate of WARBIRDS, is a newer game that shares most WB features and is clearly the best WWI sim available. It suffers from the same pricing flaw, however.

Kesmai's **AIR WARRIOR III** soldiers on with dated flight and damage models, but offers an attractive $10/month price for unlimited play. A dedicated community makes full use of the numerous arenas and new automated historical scenarios. Continual updates refresh this old vet and make it worth a look. *–John Nolan*

BASEBALL 2001



Power Rankings for This Season's Top Contenders

BY TOM PRICE

Spring is in the air. Birds are singing; bees are buzzing; and across this great land, washed-up lounge singers are practicing the national anthem—for baseball season has come again. Many fans turn to the scouting reports to see if their team has the necessary tools to go all the way. With this in mind, we did a little digital scouting of our own, and now present to you the *CGW* breakdown of this year's three big baseball contenders: MICROSOFT BASEBALL 2001, 3DO'S HIGH HEAT 2001, and EA Sports' TRIPLE PLAY 2001.

Can 3DO Repeat as Sports Game Of The Year?

High Heat 2001

Last year's record: ☆4.5☆

Developer: Team .366

Publisher: 3DO

The follow-up to *Computer Gaming World*'s 1999 Sports Game Of The Year is one of the most hotly anticipated games in the *CGW* offices. Many of us, carrying a grudge from last season (which was "won" by Editor-in-Chief George Jones in a shameless display of obvious cheating which none of us can prove, but which would explain his outrageous 68-13 record), are already looking to gain an edge this time around.

Everything we've seen of HIGH HEAT 2001 suggests that it will continue to improve upon last year's already impressive gameplay, while adding all of the league and team customization options that we were begging for.

Hello, Custom League

HIGH HEAT 2000 had one major failing: its limitations in creating a custom league. To get a custom-drafted league to work, you had to come up with a burdensome work-around that involved extra tasks and simulating games involving non-player-controlled teams. In our interoffice league this year, we'll get to dispense with the aforementioned, and set up a league with exactly as many teams as we want, playing a schedule that will foster as much interdepartmental resentment as humanly possible.

The game's on-field management—which allows a wide variety of realistic decisions—is largely unchanged, which is a good thing; they got it just about perfect the last time.

Building on Perfection

What really set apart HIGH HEAT from the other baseball games that were released last year—or any year, for that matter—was the exquisitely-modeled gameplay. With this in mind, the designers are keeping the basic game engine intact. The second-to-none pitcher/batter interface hasn't changed, but now bunting is a lot more fluid, with the bat's position no longer limited to a couple of points in the strike zone. Baserunning, one of the



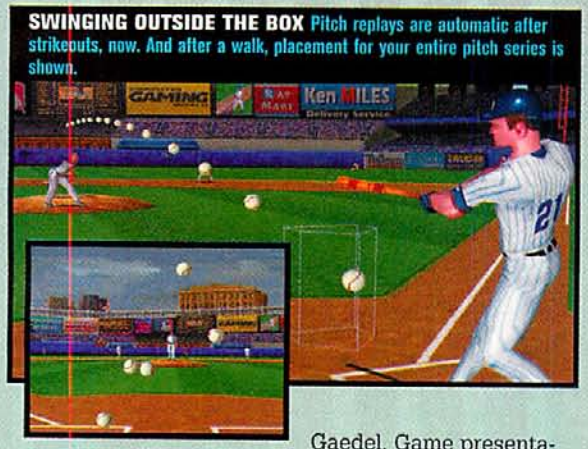
MAMA SAID KNOCK YOU OUT
One of the new animations involves outfielders running into walls.

few weak points of HH2K, has been improved. Now your runners won't be afraid to run on a two-out fly ball. Also improved this time around is the rate at which players will fatigue. Each player now has an individual fatigue rating, allowing you to more easily decide when to give your star players the rest they need.

New to this year's version is a nifty batting practice feature, which will let you take swings against the pitches (or the pitchers) that are giving you the most trouble.

No More Nomar

The most notable update to the HIGH HEAT engine is in the graphics department. Last year's single Nomar Garciaparra-esque player model has been given a few new benchmates. The burly Albert Belle model looks like it could lay off the donuts a bit, while the diminutive model could almost be used to recreate Eddie



SWINGING OUTSIDE THE BOX Pitch replays are automatic after strikeouts, now. And after a walk, placement for your entire pitch series is shown.

Gaedel. Game presentation has been improved with the addition of animations depicting players strolling into the batter's box, and new camera- and replay-views.

The Bottom Line

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. HIGH HEAT made a serious name for itself last year, capturing the hearts of nearly everyone. HH 2001 looks like it will improve upon an instant classic.

PROJECTED FINISH: 1ST

The Redmond Giant Makes Its Move

Microsoft Baseball 2001

Publisher/Developer: Microsoft

Last year's record: ☆2.5☆

Microsoft is quickly building a name for itself in the PC sports market. Last year, NFL FEVER and NBA INSIDE DRIVE surprised sports fans and provided interesting competition for the genre's two-ton gorilla, EA Sports. But MICROSOFT BASEBALL 2000 didn't fare as well, though it was dominated not by EA Sports' TRIPLE PLAY franchise but by 3DO's award-winning HIGH HEAT 2000. It seems as if Microsoft took HIGH HEAT'S successful approach to heart. This year, they are definitely going after the core audience of baseball sim fans.

Boosted by Brainpower

By incorporating the code for the critically-acclaimed, text-based BASEBALL MOGUL into the back-end of BASEBALL 2001, Microsoft makes a strong move towards enticing hardcore players who like to manage all aspects of their team. MOGUL was a fascinating baseball-and-business sim that allowed you to manage player salaries and ticket prices, as well as line-ups and overall game strategies. The ability to do all this, and then play the actual games in Microsoft's engine, should please both detail junkies and casual gamers alike.

Nice features include an economic model that lets you trade players for cash, and team strategy sliders that allow you to customize how the AI manages your team. We'd still like to see more custom teams and leagues.

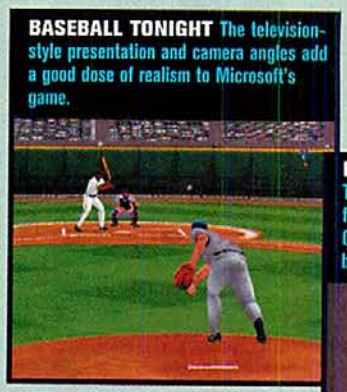
Love for the Game?

The ultimate challenge, however, is replicating the joy we have for the real-life sport by giving us the visceral feel of playing baseball on the PC. In other words, does Microsoft's BASEBALL 2001 have The Love?

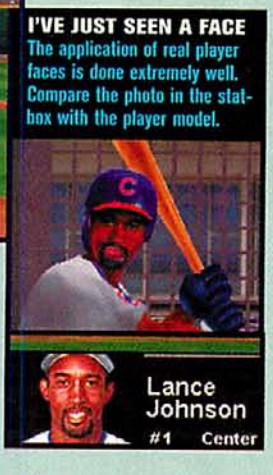
MS BASEBALL 2000 didn't, and our early look at this year's version gives us the same impression. Most of this can be blamed on the awkward and confusing implementation of the most crucial aspect of any baseball sim: the pitcher/batter interface. As in last year's version, BASEBALL 2001 reveals pitch placement prior to the pitcher's delivery. This negatively affects pitch-selection strategy and reduces the drama of each at-bat, as each player can see the intended result before each pitch. Turn off the cursor and you're essentially pitching blind, with ball placement left up to guesswork and luck. Fielding is straightforward, but the pathfinding for the outfielders needed a little work in the beta version of the game we played. We expect Microsoft to have this fixed by show time. In a necessary nod to reality, players will make throwing errors in this year's version—but injuries remain nonexistent.

Polished Up

Although their animations are slightly robotic, BASEBALL 2001's player models are incredibly realistic, with several different body types, batting stances, swings, and pitching motions. A good job has been done of importing photos of the players' faces onto the polygonal heads as well. The game features nicely polished menu screens and interfaces that make up for what are otherwise lackluster stadiums.



BASEBALL TONIGHT The television-style presentation and camera angles add a good dose of realism to Microsoft's game.



I'VE JUST SEEN A FACE The application of real player faces is done extremely well. Compare the photo in the stat-box with the player model.



I LEFT MY GLOVE IN... San Francisco's new Pac Bell Park is one of the new ball yards included in this year's edition.

It would be useful if more information—like current pitcher and batter stats—was displayed more frequently than before the first pitch of each at-bat. And the baserunner radar can



POINT AND HIT Microsoft's bizarro batting/pitching interface is still its biggest weakness.

be a little disorienting in that it tracks both baserunners and fielders at the same time. But at least it will give you both sets of data in the same space.

The Bottom Line

MICROSOFT BASEBALL 2000 was a decent, good looking baseball sim that suffered the same shortcomings that have plagued the PC baseball genre for years: lack of gameplay. Its strong points—lifelike player models, a large number of pitch types, and above-average presentation values—all make their way into this year's version; unfortunately, so does the convoluted pitcher/batter interface.

BASEBALL 2001 improves on its predecessor in some ways, but still doesn't measure up to HIGH HEAT. Yet. But the inclusion of the BASEBALL MOGUL module is a nice touch that suggests that the designers are aggressively seeking a title. This could pay off big in next year's edition.

PROJECTED FINISH: 2ND

EA Sports Stands Pat

Triple Play 2001

Publisher/Developer: EA Sports

Last year's record: ☆2.5☆

It's a sad sight when a big-time star begins to mail it in. Apparently satisfied with the success of TRIPLE PLAY 2000 on video-game consoles, EA Sports is unwilling to do much more than port the PlayStation version over to the PC. This year's version of the vaunted franchise hyper-extends realism in favor of a more arcade-like experience that seems to be aimed more at the Mountain Dew-swilling console crowd than PC baseball fans.

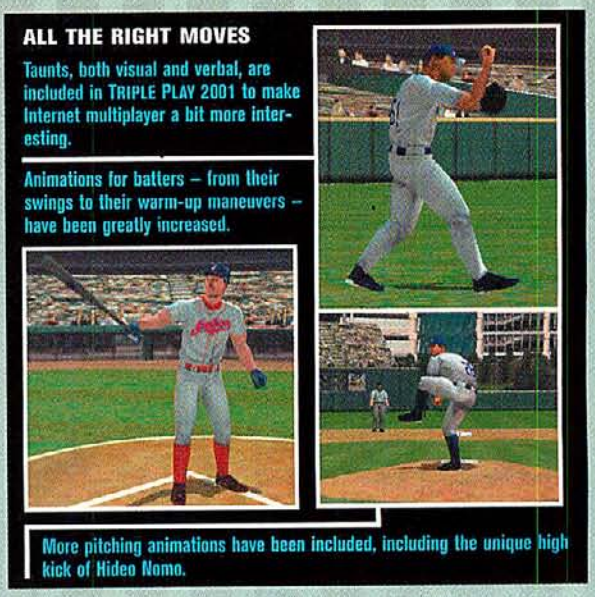


FACE OFF Face in the Game technology makes players like Jaret Wright instantly recognizable.

Mini Mogul

Like Microsoft's BASEBALL 2001, this year's TRIPLE PLAY has an economic system that uses points instead of actual dollars to let you manage the finances of your team (though to nowhere near the extent of the Microsoft game).

Although you can draft your own team, other team and league customizations are limited. One cool function is the trade system, which generates trade offers by and between computer-controlled teams. The one aspect where TRIPLE PLAY trumps the competition is in the inclusion of legendary players who belong to the 500 Home Run Club. You can even draft this roster—which includes Babe Ruth and Hank Aaron—onto your team. Or you can simply use them in Home Run Derby.



ALL THE RIGHT MOVES

Taunts, both visual and verbal, are included in TRIPLE PLAY 2001 to make Internet multiplayer a bit more interesting.

Animations for batters – from their swings to their warm-up maneuvers – have been greatly increased.

More pitching animations have been included, including the unique high kick of Hideo Nomo.

TRIPLE PLAY 2001's gameplay hasn't changed too much from last year, which is a disappointment. The pitcher/batter interface, among other on-field elements, could have used some help. Instead, EA Sports is pumping up the "extreme" elements of the game by incorporating power-ups, hidden players, and weird stadiums.

The game's Home Run Derby is licensed by Major League Baseball's Big League Challenge, an update to the classic *Home Run Derby* TV show from the 60's, being remade this season for ESPN. Unfortunately, these contests are held in fantasy-themed ballparks with bonus targets and other weirdness.

EA is well-known for its above-average graphics engines; TRIPLE PLAY is no exception. Player models look fairly realistic if a little bit chunky, and player faces are well done.

Like most other EA Sports' titles, their Face in the Game technology, which allows you to put your own face on the players you create, is included. Twenty-six different batting styles—from Mark McGuire to Babe Ruth—have been included to add more realism.

EA should be commended for trying out their new first-person perspective for fielding. It's an interesting idea, but I doubt anyone will find it serviceable.

The Bottom Line

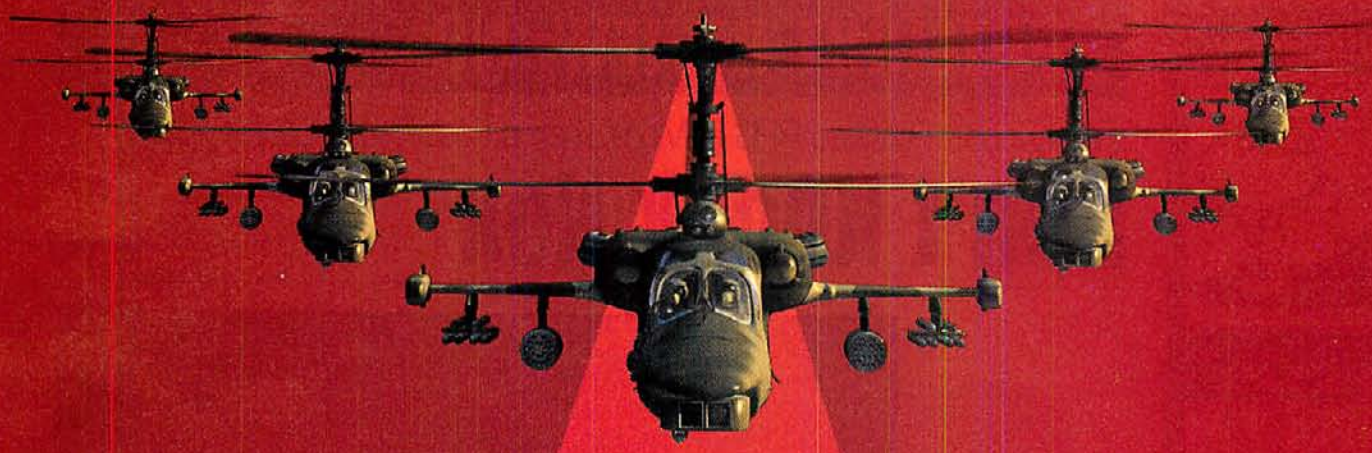
If EA Sports is happy with the console sales of TRIPLE PLAY, and is uninspired to chase after 3DO and Microsoft for the PC baseball market, this could signal the end of the TRIPLE PLAY franchise on the PC.

But the scary thing is that last year's version of TRIPLE PLAY—which was vastly inferior to 3DO's HIGH HEAT—still managed to top the charts in the baseball category. Maybe there are more "extreme" baseball fans than we think.

PROJECTED FINISH: 3RD

RECAP There aren't any big surprises in the PC baseball game this year. Barring some horrible, bug-ridden catastrophe, HIGH HEAT 2001 should easily walk away with the honors as this year's best baseball game. The only real question in our minds is whether or not it will repeat as the Best Sports Game Of The Year. The game to watch, however, is Microsoft's. Their forays into PC sports titles have been fairly interesting and impressive thus far. We expect big things out of the boys in Redmond, who are rapidly building momentum and could be serious contenders next year.

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TEEN T Animated Violence
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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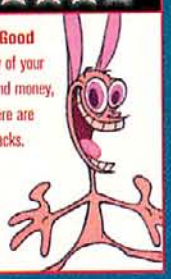
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HOW DO WE RATE?

★★★★★
Outstanding The rare game that gets it all right. A must-play experience.



★★★★
Very Good Worthy of your time and money, but there are drawbacks.



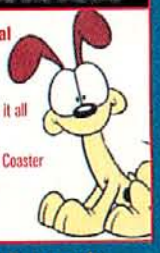
★★★
Average Either an ambitious design with major flaws, or just vanilla.



★★
Weak Seriously lacking in play value, poorly conceived, or just another clone.



★
Abysmal The rare game that gets it all wrong. Pathetic. Coaster material.



We reviews only finished games– no betas, no patches.

SPOTLIGHT REVIEW: NOX

Westwood's Polished RPG Is More Than a Fast-Paced DIABLO Clone

Don't Knock Nox

ROLE-PLAYING

reviewed by
P. Stefan "Desslock" Janicki



MMX GLORY While upcoming 2D RPGs like DIABLO 2 feature limited 3D video support, NOX relies upon those good, old, never-used MMX protocols to create impressive spell effects.

After DIABLO's remarkable success, it's surprising that it has taken three years for the predictable wave of clones to arrive. It's even more shocking that, unlike the slew of real-time strategy clones that followed WARCRAFT II and COMMAND & CONQUER, most DIABLO clones have actually proven to be quality games – and NOX continues that trend. While few elements in NOX are entirely novel, Westwood has created a polished game that provides challenging and entertaining single-player campaigns and multiplayer battlegrounds.

NOX's isometric perspective and action/RPG gameplay are unquestionably reminiscent of DIABLO, but NOX provides a more arcade-ish, action-oriented experience. Character movement is quick and combat is very fast-paced. Only enemies can be attacked, and – unlike some traditional RPGs – there are no ethical codes. If the game permits you to destroy an object, slaughter a creature, or pilfer possessions, then rest assured that it's the right thing to do. Since causing chaos isn't penalized, action is almost constant as your character frantically runs through levels, smashing objects and dispatching foes.

Deathmatch RPG

Multiplayer NOX is a pure action game that features respawning items, quick kills, and geographically limited arenas; and it's completely devoid of character development, NPCs, or monsters. It's closer to an isometric, swords-and-sorcery version of QUAKE than it is to DIABLO. Multiplayer characters immediately possess all of their class' abilities and spells (other than those removed for gameplay balance), which makes the deathmatch, capture the flag, and other multiplayer games included more tactical than they typically are in first-person shoot-

CGW RATED

PROS
Fast-paced action; great interface; distinct character types and single-player campaigns; solid AI.

CONS
No difficulty levels; no cooperative multiplayer campaigns.

Requirements: Pentium II or Pentium 200 MMX, 32MB RAM, 300MB hard drive space.
Recommended Requirements: P-II 266, 64MB RAM.
3D Support: None **Multiplayer Support:** Up to 32 players over Westwood On-line, or by LAN.

Publisher/ Developer: Westwood Studios • $39.95 • www.westwood.com
ESRB Rating: Teen; animated violence.

HOW MUCH FOR THE BOOTY? The action rarely slows down, except when you're cashing in your ill-gotten goods. The campaigns are saturated with brief – but entertaining – scripted sequences.



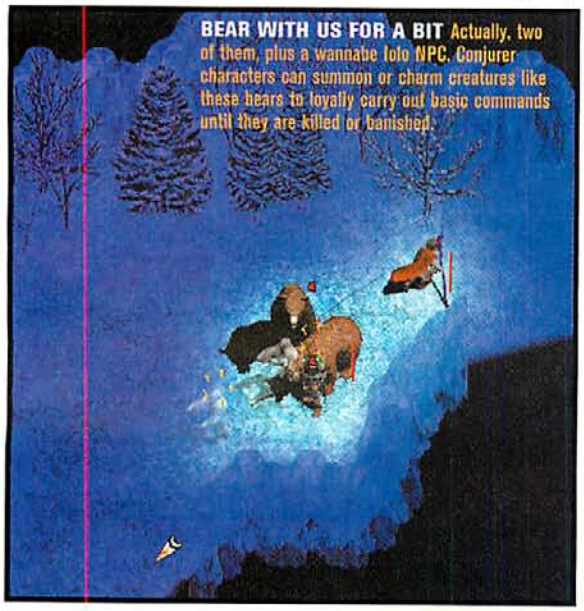
ers. Still, multiplayer NOX may not experience the longevity that more visceral shooters have enjoyed.

The single-player campaigns feature a few additional RPG elements, as characters acquire experience points and solve simple quests, but the gameplay emphasis remains on action. The campaigns are linear and level-based, so there's no way to personalize your experience other than through your choice of attire and armaments. Surprisingly, there are no difficulty settings, so you'll have to be adept with occasionally frantic action in order to complete the campaigns. Fortunately, NOX features a remarkably intuitive and effective hotkey interface that permits you to quickly change weapons or access available spells and abilities. There's never been a more efficient interface in an action/RPG.

Each of the three character classes has a separate campaign, but you'll travel through most of the same areas and have the same overall quest. The classes have significantly different abilities and the campaigns play out differently, even when you're exploring familiar territory. While a wizard may peacefully stroll through a stronghold, a warrior may be immediately attacked.

As far as plot goes, it's pretty uninspired. A dislocated trailer-trash youth must assemble a multi-component artifact and stomp undead hordes led by a maniacal necromancer queen. The campaigns are saturated with brief, but entertaining, scripted sequences that play out using the game's engine. Westwood has a penchant for adding goofy

BEAR WITH US FOR A BIT Actually, two of them, plus a wannabe lolo NPC. Conjurer characters can summon or charm creatures like these bears to loyally carry out basic commands until they are killed or banished.



QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"The next time a snooty German makes a rude comment about how we Yanks made DEER HUNTER the top-selling game in the U.S., you can whip out a copy of 1602 A.D. and slowly, deliberately begin to chuckle."

–Jason Kapalka reviewing 1602 AD"

Killing Time

Nothing can give white hair to *CGW's* Managing Editor—the guy responsible for getting the other editors to turn in their work on time—like the arrival of an addictive game in our offices. Everything comes to a complete stop as editors ignore piles of work to play the latest game for eight hours straight. (OK, we're exaggerating a bit; we do break for lunch.) Currently, it's THE SIMS that has the staff by the short ones, but for some strange reason, current Managing Editor Chris Lombardi isn't complaining, which is a little unusual.

When QUAKE took over the office in 1995, then-ME Ken "Genghis" Brown tried everything from begging to crying to running around naked with his hair on fire to get people back to work, to no avail (although that little episode was the inspiration behind a very cool QUAKE skin).

In 1998, Joe "Woody" Vallina couldn't get us to take down our HALF-LIFE server, so he gave up and played with us with the proviso that anyone he dropped with the crossbow had to get back to work immediately. And back in December, UNREAL TOURNAMENT dominated our office to such a degree that Lombardi snuck in after-hours and confiscated the 3D cards from every PC. Thank God for software rendering.

But now we think we have this whole ME problem figured out. You see, we assigned the review of THE SIMS to Lombardi. How can he bitch at us for playing while he's in his office with the door closed, trying to up his fun rating while managing his bladder (and playing THE SIMS, to boot)? We just got word that HIGH HEAT 2001 has gone gold. Hey Chris, you want to do another review?
–Tom Price



Motivational techniques by Ken Brown

MAY REVIEWS

GAME	RATING	PAGE
1602 A.D.	★★★½★	110
Aces High	★★★★★	96
Dirt Track Racing	★★★★½	112
Final Fantasy VIII	★★★½★	92
Hidden & Dangerous: Devil's Bridge	★★★★★	116
Mind Rover	★★½★★	116
Nox	★★★½★	88
Rising Sun	★★★★½	106
The Sims	★★★★★	64
Superbike 2000	★★★★★	114
TA: Kingdoms, Iron Plague	★★★½★	116

humor to its RPGs, and the buffoonery here works better than in the past couple of LAND OF LORE games, partially compensating for the plot's lack of originality. There're a few big laughs, such as an early scene in the wizard campaign when an expected showdown with a formidable nemesis is prematurely cut short in comical *Raiders of the Lost Ark* fashion.



GANDALF, HELP ME OUT The ogres are running rampant through the wizard's tower. Thankfully, this NPC wizard will zap a few for me.

See No Evil

NOX's most distinctive features are its method for handling your character's line of sight, and its interactive environments. The game uses a line-of-sight system that blacks out areas behind trees or other obstacles that characters couldn't reasonably see beyond. The effect isn't revolutionary, since 1983's ULTIMA III featured a rudimentary version of a similar system, and it can be more distracting than interesting. It does give NOX a distinctive look, however, and it's easy to adjust to the onscreen automap if you require additional navigation.



WELCOME TO BALDUR'S GATE! The isometric graphics can look familiar, but NOX definitely has its own style.

NOX'S levels are littered with moveable furniture, bones, and other objects. Occasionally you must use these objects to solve puzzles – moving a crate over a pressure plate, for instance – but usually the objects are just there to be smashed or hurled wildly when they're struck by explosive spell effects. A lot of attention to detail went into NOX's level design, as dwellings are decorated with appropriate objects, and subterranean lairs look suitably homey for their troll inhabitants.



WIDESCREEN FORMAT, PLEASE All of the cutscenes play out using the game's engine. You can tell you're in a non-interactive segment when the screen narrows to this letterboxed view.

NOX's two-dimensional, isometric graphics are highly detailed and similar in style to those in ULTIMA ONLINE and DIABLO. While some upcoming isometric RPGs like BALDUR'S GATE 2 feature limited support for 3D video cards, NOX relies instead on those mysterious, superseded MMX protocols you heard so much about in 1997 to create its impressive spell effects. Three different resolutions are supported (640x480, 800x600, and 1024x768), but the highest resolution isn't practical for most gamers, since the characters look tiny and the screen scrolling gets pretty choppy – even on high-end machines.

The artificial intelligence of the monsters and NPCs in NOX'S campaigns is generally excellent. AI-controlled NPCs will sporadically ally with your character for the duration of a level. You'll have no direct control over these NPCs, but they'll capably follow your character and engage any enemies you encounter. Conjurer characters can also summon or charm creatures that will loyally carry out basic commands until they are killed or banished. There are memorable levels where settlements are attacked and you can acquire a whole flock of allies to help fight the waves of intruders. Since the AI is so good, however, it's especially disappointing that there are no cooperative multiplayer campaigns.

The only notable AI flaw is that enemies at extreme visibility range won't react until they're attacked. Since there are a variety of spells and weapons that either kill enemies instantly or do massive damage, you can pre-empt otherwise challenging battles by advancing slowly and picking off immobile enemies as soon as they're visible. Like grandma used to say, nothing clears a path better than a gigantic Fist of Vengeance. Or a Death Ray.

Who You Callin' a Clone?

It's unfair to simply dismiss NOX as a DIABLO clone, since the game had been in development limbo for years prior to its acquisition by Westwood. Westwood acquired the orphaned NOX following the dissolution of Virgin Interactive's U.S. gaming division, and the company has done a great job finalizing the game. Even though it likely could have been released several months ago, the additional attention to detail put into the game has resulted in a streamlined interface, solid single-player campaigns and, overall, a considerably more polished product. Even the installation program is almost as interesting as the great one that shipped with the original COMMAND & CONQUER.

NOX could easily have been a game with a few original ideas that devolved into a hastily developed, derivative, uninteresting clone. Instead, the developers have taken the necessary time to create a unique game that offers different and enjoyable single- and multiplayer experiences. CGW



STOP THAT NECROMANCER! During one of the siege levels, undead and necromancers have completely overrun this town. Not to worry: scores of trusty fire knights will assist you. Make sure you keep healing them.

HOW TO PICK A WINNING SOFTBALL TEAM #27:

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FINAL FANTASY VIII Is a Major Disappointment as a Port and as a Game

When Ports Go Bad

Like forks, coffee mugs, and black 3.5-inch disks with something indecipherable written on them in pencil, the omnipresent PlayStation is just a thing that you have, and you don't know when or how you acquired it. So, a developer creating a PC port of one of the most successful PlayStation games ever made really needs to differentiate it from its console incarnation by playing to the strengths of the PC platform. SquareSoft's port of its PlayStation mega-hit FINAL FANTASY VIII not only doesn't improve upon the original, but, thanks to the exactness of the port – more emulation than translation – it manages to make an already flawed game truly awful.

FINAL FANTASY VIII
reviewed by Erik Wolpaw

Looks Bad, Less Filling

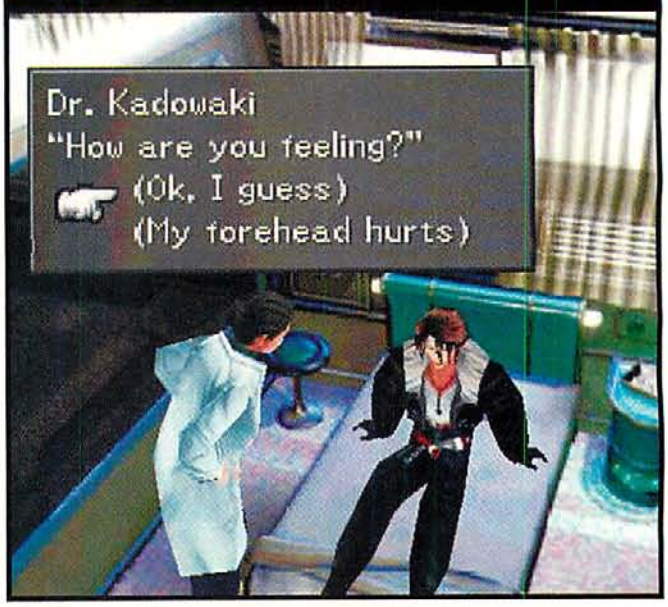
Most PlayStation games run in 320x240. While that's pretty chunky, when viewed from your couch six feet away, it's acceptable. All of FINAL FANTASY VIII'S complex backgrounds are rendered in that low resolution. Instead of reworking the graphics for the PC version, the developers decided to leave the low resolution intact, and the game suffers because of it. Thanks to this decision, FINAL FANTASY's greatest asset on the PlayStation – its amazing pre-rendered imagery – becomes its predominant flaw on the PC. The backgrounds are blurry and pixilated. What looks good from six feet falls apart at six inches.

Virtually all of the game's dialogue is presented as on-screen text, and even the font resolution hasn't been upgraded from its console counterpart. The font is jagged and amazingly ugly, and serves as a constant reminder that you're not playing the game as it was meant to be experienced.

The character models themselves have been upgraded somewhat; FINAL FANTASY VIII supports 3D acceleration and, apparently, this is where the power of that device is being applied. However, rather than adding any value to the game, the more detailed models simply clash with the indistinct backgrounds, giving the graphics a nasty disjointed look. The texture work on the models remains low-res, and could be described most kindly as fuzzy.

PC sound hardware also appears to give the FINAL FANTASY VIII emulator a savage licking. On two different systems, *every* scene transition (and there are a lot of them) resulted in three or four seconds of stuttery sound and general slowdown. The music, too, often sounds tinny and distant. And speaking of slowdown, while the game generally runs at a good clip, the outside-world navigation screens crawl. And here, we're talking about slowdown noticeable and painful enough that you could make a case for calling it a bug. On the plus side, this area isn't accessible until about fifteen or twenty hours into the game, so you'll probably be back to playing PLANESCAPE: TORMENT before you have to deal with it.

FONTASTICALLY UGLY! This is the very first scene in the game. And that font doesn't get any prettier later on.



MIXED MEDIA Here's a convergence of the blurry backgrounds, the simultaneously fuzzy and sharp characters, and the muddy font. That lady doesn't think it's funny, either.



The Unbearable Boringness of Guardian Force

Even with all of these graphical and sound problems, there's one simple thing that the developers could have done to redeem themselves. The major, and – in many gamers' opinion – fatal flaw of FINAL FANTASY VIII PlayStation is the dreaded, uninterruptible Guardian Force attack. For those of you not already familiar with the game, Guardian Force attacks are a kind of combination summoning spell and semi-party member. They evolve over time, using a compli-

CGW RATED

PROS
It doesn't flat-out crash, and it has a fun subgame.

CONS
Laziest console translation ever.

Requirements: Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, 8MB 3D graphics card, 300MB disk space. **Recommended Requirements:** P-II 266, 64MB RAM, 16MB 3D card.
3D Support: 3Dfx, nVidia, Matrox, ATI. **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: SquareSoft/Electronic Arts • **Developer:** SquareSoft • **$40** • **www.squaresoft.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

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RP RATING PENDING ESRB — Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for more info.

TROIKA GAMES

cated "junction" system that lets them gain new abilities. They're sort of like a Pokémon, only more confusing.

In battle, Guardian Force attacks quickly become your primary offensive ability. When cast, every Guardian Force is accompanied by an over-the-top but often beautifully rendered animation. The problem, and it's a big one, is that these displays take upwards of a minute to present, and you can't interrupt them or turn them off. FINAL FANTASY VIII doesn't buck the genre tradition of requiring you to fight thousands of random battles to advance the plot, meaning that you'll be watching these long animations many, many times. What's impressive at first soon becomes annoying, and then – depending on your patience and desire to perform rote, non-interactive combat actions over and over again – unbearable.

The fact that this was the single biggest complaint with the PlayStation version, and that the developers chose not to expend the small amount of effort it would have taken to fix it in the PC version, should be reason enough for you to boycott FINAL FANTASY VIII on general principle. Maybe there's some technical reason it can't be done, but since modern technology is capable of producing clones and the U.S. government's amazingly realistic moon-landing hoax – not to mention FINAL FANTASIES I-VII – I'm going to apply Ockham's razor and chalk it up to laziness.

Love and Money

If you've read this far and have no previous experience with FINAL FANTASY VIII and are still considering purchasing it and want more information, then perhaps you missed three or four of the preceding paragraphs; but fine, here's some more.

Eschewing the previous installments' tales of heroes saving worlds from disaster, number eight's plot is smaller and more personal, centering more on individual redemption and combat against evil of a less planet-imperiling nature, while not forgetting to include lots of random fighting. The series is famous for covering issues not usually addressed by console RPGs. Topics such as love, betrayal, and salvation are par for the course, and while these are novel concepts for a video game, *Beverly Hillbillies The Movie* included some love and betrayal, so these ideas by themselves don't necessarily guarantee compelling entertainment.

SquareSoft has made a few interesting design choices that represent a rethinking of some genre conventions. Gone is the pursuit of wealth, armor, and weapons. Your team gets a periodic stipend which you can use to buy various basic supplies, but other than that, there's no pressing need for money. Armor is essentially non-existent, and, aside from each character's single standard weapon (which can go through a few upgrades), your major offensive tool is the aforementioned Guardian Force attacks.

Another feature worth mentioning is a very cool little collectable card game called Triple Triad that appears throughout the entire game. Triple Triad is an addictive, simplified version of Magic and it's well integrated – rare cards can be traded for rare items. It's a fun bonus, and you may find yourself wishing you didn't have to slog through the interminable other parts of FINAL FANTASY VIII to get to your next card match.

Final Answer

No matter what your feelings are about FINAL FANTASY VIII as a game, with some minor and a few major tweaks, the PC version could at least have been a great reworking of the PlayStation original. Unfortunately, the released game is inarguably substandard because *absolutely* no effort has been made to add value to the initial product. And this from a company known for the quality of its work. Shame on you, SquareSoft. CGW



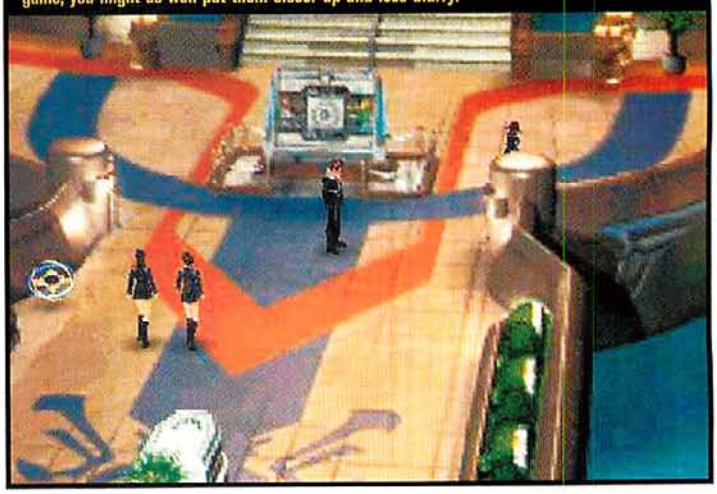
WE SHOP AT THE GAP Regular pants, workout pants, mantaloons... (pantaloons for men). Also note blurriness.



IN CASE YOU DIDN'T GET THE POINT.... This battle scene really shows off the brave pants-free position SquareSoft takes regarding female characters.



IS THERE A DRAFT IN HERE? Male members of SeeD wear pants. Female members wear no pants.



MORE BLURRY PANTSLESSNESS If you're going to have half-naked girls in the game, you might as well put them closer up and less blurry.

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TROIKA GAMES

ACES HIGH Raises the Online Air Combat Stakes

Mayhem at 30,000 Feet

In an era of gigabyte-sized installs, it's simply amazing what some guys can do with 6 megs of disk space. Two key ex-programmers from the renowned WARBIRDS franchise – Dale "HiTech" Addink and Doug "Pyro" Balmos – have formed HiTech Creations and produced a new WWII online air-combat game using that tiny bit of magnetic real estate. ACES HIGH has lots of features, too; it's not just a "bare bones" fighter arena with average artwork and modeling. Small in stature, this game is large in promise.

ACES HIGH
reviewed by John Nolan

Hit and Run Strafing in cannon-equipped aircraft like this La-5FN will destroy your ground targets, but if the "ack" is up, it's sheer suicide. Wait for the bombers to have their fun, and then "vultch" (go for the vulture kill)!



Been There, Done That, Great Fun!

ACES HIGH isn't a revolutionary breakthrough in the world of online air combat. If you've spent any time playing WARBIRDS or AIR WARRIOR, you already know the drill. Enlist in the Air Force of your homeland, fly against opposing countries, and try to capture airfields from the enemy. When any side is reduced to a single base, the arena automatically resets and the war begins again. With a worldwide online player base, the action continues around the clock. The hangar presently offers 15 different aircraft, with two bombers to pound the enemy defenses; 12 fighters to establish air superiority; and a paratrooper-dropping C-47 to conquer the aerodromes. HiTech Creations delivered new aircraft every month during the beta period, and more are in production. All the standard favorites – like the Spitfire, P-51, and Bf-109 – are here, but a few interesting lesser-known models are also showing up, like the Italian Maachi 205 fighter.

The ACES HIGH flight model is respectable, and offers a great compromise between playability and total realism. It isn't anything you haven't seen before, and – not surprisingly –it's pretty close to WARBIRDS. The aircraft are more difficult to fly well than AIR WARRIOR's mounts, primarily because of torque effects. However, they don't require the gentle touch of WARBIRDS planes near the stall, so you can be pretty ham-handed in an ACES HIGH cockpit without spinning the aircraft. If you fly decently in the other games, you can fly this one. There'll be a period of adjustment, joyfully known online as "clubbing the baby seal," but eventually you'll be the predator instead of the prey.

The two biggest gripes with the modeling are drag and structural failure. These planes are difficult to slow down in the "clean configuration," even with the engine off. Using full rudder to slow down helps, but there's work to be done in the drag department. Deploying gear and flaps doesn't cause much change in pitch or power either, and that's another indication. Frustrating structural failures can occur without warning in some aircraft. Since most of these fighters had at least a +6 G limitation, there ought to be a visual cue to indicate that you're pulling enough G to bend something. Blackout and red-out are modeled, as is buffeting, but you can often rip a wing off without inducing these effects, which is pretty strange. Pieces don't just snap off of airplanes without some kind of warning.

FRESH BLOOD This Italian C-205 is rarely seen in any flight simulation. It's a capable fighter and its inclusion shows HTC's responsiveness to its worldwide clientele.



JUST CAN'T WIN Remember these two simple rules: 1. Don't duel the guns. 2. DON'T DUEL THE GUNS! Up to 7000 feet above the field, ack rules; the airplane always loses.



Good Picture, Excellent View

ACES HIGH features modern 3D graphics, with five resolutions from 640x480 up to 1600x1200, using either 16- or 32-bit color. Standard texture mapping is 64x64, but hi-resolution 256x256 textures are available if you have the horsepower to run them. It's all very good stuff, but like the flight model, the competitive graphics don't shout "breakthrough." The view system – perhaps the crux of any air-combat sim – is excellent. For each aircraft, you can adjust your "head" position and save over 24 "customized" views. The system offers snap, pan, and zoom modes; however, despite the anguished wailing of some of the beta testers, there is no padlock view and the cockpit artwork is non-

CGW RATED

PROS
An impressive debut of a "bound for glory" game that slakes your thirst for non-stop WW II air combat at a reasonable price.

CONS
You'd expect a few "breakthrough" innovations in an all-new online air-combat game, but while well-executed and lots of fun, this one is "business as usual."

Requirements: Pentium-II 233, Pentium MMX or better, D3D-compatible video card, joystick, sound card, speakers. **3D Support:** Direct3D

Publisher: HiTech Creations • **$29.95 per month** • **www.hitechcreations.com**



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Build.

y overextending yourself when constructing your Sims' first home,
nces (like a refrigerator and a bathtub) before building the house.
r house, start small. You can always expand it later.
s early on will allow you to hold more objects than many smaller rooms.
s with interesting shapes rather than boxy, rectilinear ones.
ace, place your staircases outside.
ve a hefty bank account, don't neglect your landscaping possibilities.
require no maintenance, and can boost your outside room score.
elevated walkways around your lot using the columns and floor tool.
e close to the street makes it easier for your Sims
ol or school bus.





- Another must buy for the first time homeowner is a telephone. If your Sim doesn't have a phone, they can't talk with the neighbors, call the cops, hire a maid, or even order pizza.
- Once your Sims have a good pile of cash you can earn a nice living by just buying and selling expensive artwork that appreciates over time (buy low, sell high).
- Another possible moneymaker is the burglar alarm. Buying one can protect your Sims' possessions and allow your Sims to collect reward money when the crook is caught.
- Don't wait until your appliances break down to call the repairman. Call him over to do routine maintenance.





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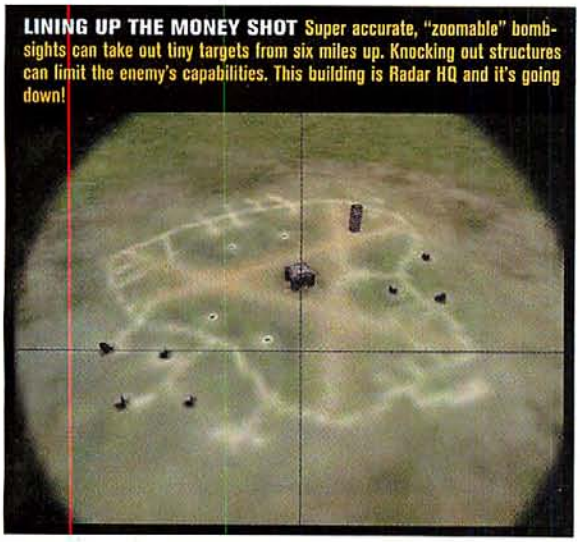
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A Division of Electr

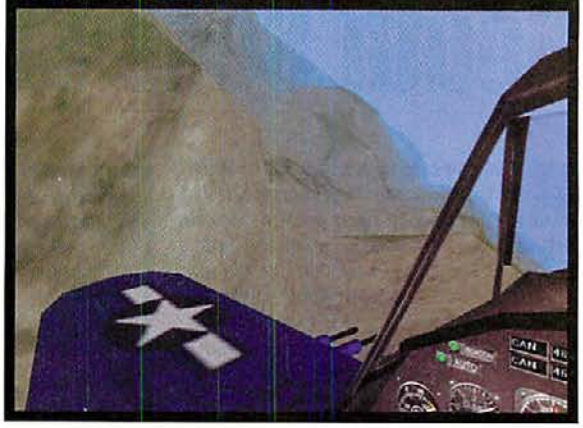
removable (as it should be). You have to fly the airplane to keep the bandit in sight and do it without view-key crutches. Some players do view the zoom feature as a crutch, but ACES HIGH uses the "industry standard" way of rendering aircraft in air combat maneuver games.

Bottom Line: Bucks

The trump cards of ACES HIGH are the quality components and its $30/month unlimited-play pricing structure. This is a good game of near-WARBIRDS quality, with a great player community. Gameplay is essentially the same in all these games, so that's not the major factor. WARBIRDS may feature a slightly more difficult (or a bit more accurate) flight model and a huge hangar full of different aircraft, but it's also prohibitively expensive. At the lowest WARBIRDS "Platinum package" price of $1.50/hour, $30/month buys you 20 hours – a mere moment in combat online. AIR WARRIOR – with rare revisions to its dated flight, gunnery, and damage models – is only $10/month for unlimited play, but it doesn't begin to give you the tangible feel of air combat that ACES HIGH provides.

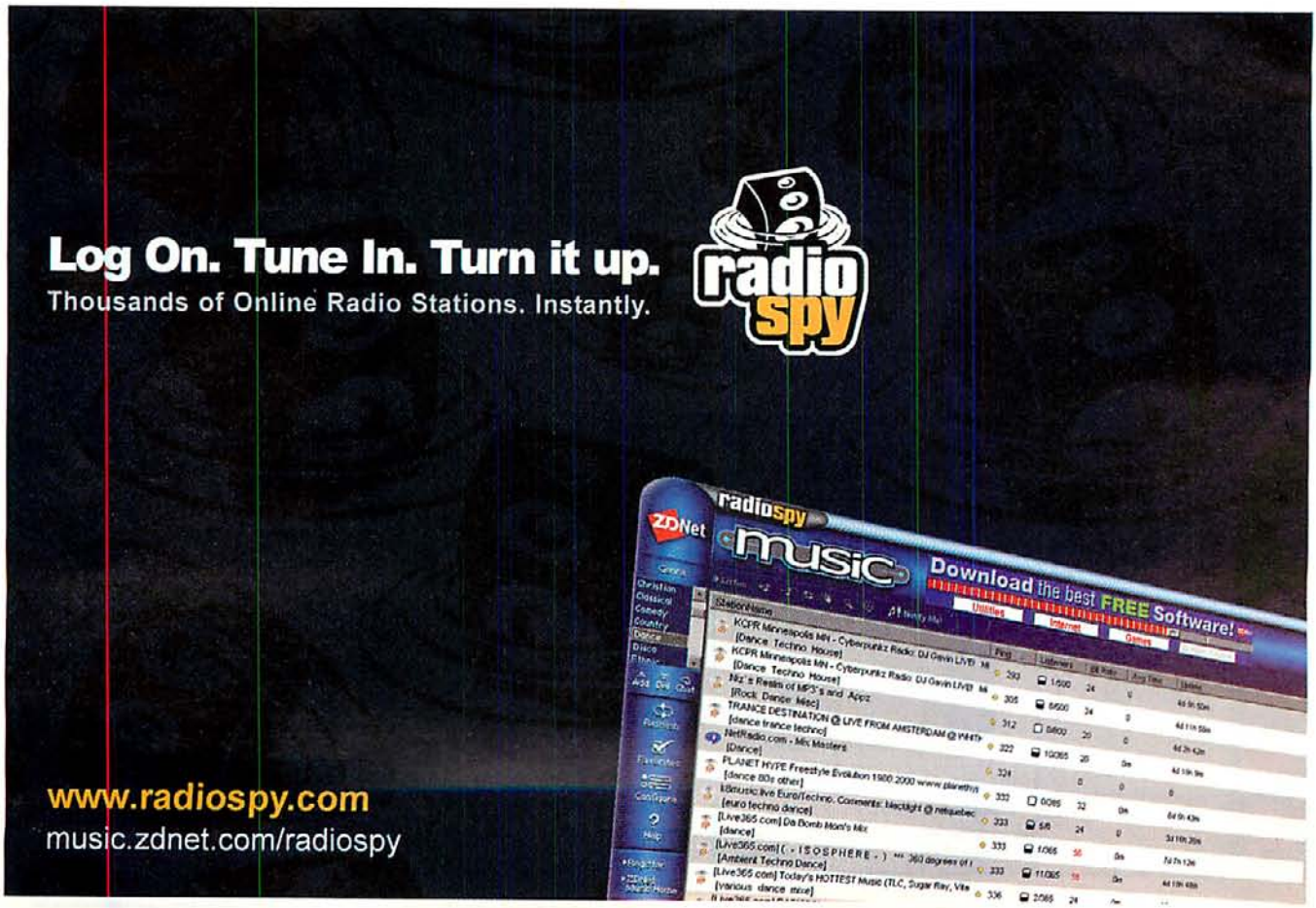


LINING UP THE MONEY SHOT Super accurate, "zoomable" bombsights can take out tiny targets from six miles up. Knocking out structures can limit the enemy's capabilities. This building is Radar HQ and it's going down!



GRAND CANYONS The rolling terrain makes the map seem much larger. Canyon fights are thrilling, requiring the ultimate flying skills to get the victory and avoid crashing.

Furthermore, HiTech Creations' philosophy is that ACES HIGH will probably never be a "finished" game. They promise constant development and improvement in overall gameplay and technology, and a total focus on this one game. So far, they've been true to their words, with new aircraft and game features arriving every week or two. The "value" should go up while the price stays low. This one is good, and will only get better. CGW



RISING SUN Captures the Desperate Feel of WW II Jungle Warfare

South Seas Slugfest

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

RISING SUN does such a good job of bringing the Pacific war to your computer that you'd be wise to invest in some mosquito netting. While the Campaign series has steadily improved through its several iterations, the way in which RISING SUN accommodates the many special conditions unique to the Pacific theater makes it far more than just a version of WEST FRONT with funny-looking tanks. In fact, the nature of jungle combat actually lends itself better to the scale of the Campaign series, which at 250 yards per hex make Eastern Front scenarios feel a bit cramped. Because of the restrictive effects of jungle terrain on combat, the close ranges at which engagements are fought in RISING SUN seem quite authentic, and do much to highlight the importance of high ground and indirect fire, as well as the deadliness of close assaults. Don't waste those mortars! Night combat, caves, banzai attacks, and many new terrain types round out what has to be the most complete package available to tactical wargamers. Yet even with all of this detail, the game preserves the elegant feel of the Campaign series.

RISING SUN
reviewed by Bruce Geryk

SAFE TO SURF THIS BEACH? Every scenario offers a stiff challenge, but the Japanese defense at Peleliu includes mined beaches, dragon's teeth, and supporting artillery.



RISING SUN provides a wide range of scenarios from introductory to very large and complex, and complements the package with several campaign games, both dynamic and linked. In keeping with Campaign series tradition, RISING SUN is practically a stand-alone database of weapons, and the included scenario editor should allow players to transfer their favorite battles to the computer screen with a minimum of difficulty.

NICE TO SEE A FAMILIAR FACE Wargame purists still have several 2D views available.



Tokyo Express

While the AI in RISING SUN is decent and puts up a good fight, the multiplayer game is spectacular. Up to 16 players can take part in Internet or LAN games, allowing for many separate players per side. The network code is simply glassy, with absolutely no lag or hiccups, even with several players on slow dial-up connections. The PBEM implementation allows players to see a complete replay of an opponent's turn, and includes password protection in case you suspect your opponent has his own Enigma machine.

RISING SUN takes the hex-based, sequential-turn wargame to a level of refinement previously unseen in a genre known for its preference for accuracy over polish. If you even remotely enjoy this form of combat simulation, RISING SUN is your game. The mosquito netting is extra. CGW

UP AGAINST IT These Marines have nowhere to go but forward.



CGW RATED



PROS
A fitting cap to the Campaign series.

CONS
It took them five games to get here.

Requirements: Pentium 200MHz, 32MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM, 70MB hard drive space, 2MB video card. **3D Support:** None
Multiplayer Support: Internet or LAN (2-16 players), modem/serial (2 players), one CD per player.

Publisher: Take Two Interactive • Developer: TalonSoft • $45 • www.talonsoft.com
RSAC Rating: 1; Violence, damage to realistic objects.



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Real time strategy had no room for heroics.

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Found a New Civilization—Then Watch it Flounder Helplessly and Die!

Doomed To Repeat the Past

1602 A.D.

reviewed by Jason Kapalka

Certain phrases in the 1602 A.D. press kit sent shivers up my spine. Specifically, these were: "#1 Best Selling Game of All Time in Germany!" and "PC Heft & Spiel Game of the Year... *1998*." When it takes *two years* for the #1 German computer game to find a stateside publisher (aging all the while, rather unlike fine wine), one can't help but wonder what in the world the #2 and #3 bestsellers in Germany were – BEER HUNTER, BARBIE'S SCHNITZEL MAKER, or what?

1602 A.D., in any case, turns out to be a city-building strategy game set in a rather abstract New World. Players anxious for a successor to COLONIZATION or CONQUEST OF THE NEW WORLD will be disappointed to learn that instead of competing to colonize the Americas against Spain, Portugal, and England, you'll struggle against the ominously-titled Red, Blue, and Yellow Players for control of a very small chain of Gilligan-esque tropical islands. More than anything else, 1602 A.D. resembles CAESAR III and its sequel PHARAOH, but with itsy-bitsy pilgrims and pirates instead of toga dudes and hippos.

Like any good explorer of a New World, I decided to keep a journal of my discoveries, which I'll share with you now:

0 min: After ESCing through a predictably lame CGI intro, I glean false hope as I breeze through the tutorial missions in about eight minutes flat.

8 min: Start "free-form" game. Problems arise three hours in when I realize that I've run out of tools, the traders aren't selling any more of them, and I have no idea where or how to find iron to make my own. Restart.

4 hours: Find lots of tobacco, spice, and sugar, but no iron, making it difficult to advance beyond Flinstone tech levels. Manual oddly reticent about this seemingly vital task. Eventually trigger "iron detection" feature accidently when my brow impacts the keyboard.

6 hours: Puzzle over the strange icon of what seems to be a scoop of Kellogg's Raisin Bran that has been appearing over my buildings intermittently. The manual helpfully instructs me to "Draw your conclusions and correct the problem." In this I fail. Budget drops hopelessly into the red. Restart.

10 hours: Still trying to figure out the economic/city model, which bears little resemblance to SIMCITY, CAESAR, or, for that matter, reality. Industries don't appear to need citizens to work them, while residents don't seem to care if their house is located between a gallows and a cattle farm. Run out of tools again. Restart.

13 hours: Finally succeed in building an iron mine and tool factory on a nearby island and spend an hour puzzling out the intricacies of the "auto-trade" system. As my bank account again slips inexorably into the red, I note that the narrator's announcement that "The alcohol is running out!" carries far more urgency than his notice that "There is not enough food," which perhaps is why there are half a dozen different structures required to produce beer. Restart.

20 hours: Feeling confident enough to try one of the many campaigns and scenarios instead of the "sandbox" mode. Pirates, who helpfully do not show up on the radar map, immediately sink my single irreplaceable ship. Restart.

25+ hours: Start eyeing "Uninstall" icon hungrily. Restart. Restart. Restart.

In fairness, the game does have a weird, counter-intuitive charm that keeps you coming back, restart after restart – at least if you're a reviewer who isn't allowed to just go back to THE SIMS. And if nothing else, the next time a snooty German makes a rude comment about how we Yanks made DEER HUNTER the top-selling game in the U.S., you can whip out a copy of 1602 A.D. and slowly, deliberately, begin to chuckle. CGW

HISTORICALLY-ACCURATE STEALTH GALLEONS This would be the home base of the much-beloved pirates of 1602 A.D., who come equipped with some sort of Flintstones cloaking device that shields them from your "radar."



FIRST YOU LAUGH A merry juggler livens up the festivities of the daily hanging. Note the lovely high-priced residences adjacent to the gallows with their perfect window views.



FAKE IT SO The thriving, healthy city you're unlikely to see unless, ahem, you start fooling about with the handy-dandy Scenario Editor.



CGW RATED

PROS

Unquestionably the best CAESAR/SIMCITY knock-off to ever come out of Germany, after THE SETTLERS I, II, and III.

CONS

Economic model more confusing than the *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*.

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz, 32MB RAM, 100MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 200, 64MB RAM. **3D Support:** None
Multiplayer Support: LAN (2-4 players), modem, serial connections (2 players), one CD per player.

Publisher: GT Interactive • **Developer:** Sunflowers • **$30** • **www.gtinteractive.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone; animated violence.

Tom Clancy's

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Red Storm ENTERTAINMENT

If So, Then Ratbag Has a Game for You

Bored By Asphalt?



I had one thought in mind when I first loaded Ratbag's DIRT TRACK RACING: Red Man chewing tobacco. Even though I know better than to pre-judge games, with this one I just couldn't help myself. Hell, is there anything else in contemporary America that better evokes images of a cheek full of tobaccy, the video for John Mellencamp's "Pink Houses," and a '65 Chevy Bel Air rusting on somebody's front lawn?

Man, was I on the wrong page. While DIRT TRACK RACING sure is redneck-friendly, it does not bow to the lowest common denominator. This is a great racing title, period. It's packed with excitement and boasts an immersion factor that's second to none. It's right up there with NEED FOR SPEED: HIGH STAKES as one of the finest racers of the past year. And as much fun as I had with NFS:HS since its release last summer, after two weeks with Ratbag's game I'd have a tough time deciding which to take with me to a desert isle.

Doing That Bump and Grind

Gameplay consists of guiding hunks of junk around short dirt ovals located in small towns across the United States. Races are chaotic affairs, both because of the friction-free earth beneath your tires and because of narrow tracks that turn every attempt to pass into a bump-and-grind frenzy. They're also more intense than the average NASCAR event, since the courses are so short (expect to take a lap in no more than 18 seconds). Computer opponents are vicious at the higher difficulty settings, and will freely bounce you all over the place in their attempt to gain that vital few extra feet.

DIRT TRACK RACING
reviewed by Brett Todd

While you can stage one-off races, they're just warm-ups for my favorite part of DIRT TRACK RACING: career mode. You start off with a measly thousand bucks that's just enough to get you an aged '60s or '70s era muscle car (given fake names like Jupiter and Mars here, but look closely and you'll recognize Chevy and Chrysler silhouettes), and a spot in the lowly Stock Class. From there, you work for cash purses and sponsorships that bring in additional green needed for car repairs, purchases, and upgrades. Vehicles are fully configurable, so expect to spend some time playing with gear ratios, weight distribution, and the like.

Success doesn't come easy. Prize money is next to nothing at first, forcing you to drive conservatively to avoid high repair bills (if you're playing with "realistic damage" on). One or two serious early collisions, and you'll be left without enough money to fix your ride – meaning that it's time to restart your career or load a save. Some might not like the nickel and dime stuff here, but nobody should expect life to be glamorous when racing in places like LaFargeville, NY. Personally, I enjoyed the gritty attention to reality. It adds a lot to the game's longevity, and makes you think twice before trying to bump your way to the head of the pack.

The Internet multiplayer option is another serious plus. Ratbag did a great job with this, providing an online experience that is virtually lag-free. About the only drawback is the 10-player maximum, which isn't much when you consider that NASCAR RACING 3 supports fields of 32 drivers.

PRETTY ON THE INSIDE? DIRT TRACK RACING is anything but pretty. Rusted, beat-up cars and advertising boards that apparently double as late-night shotgun targets make for a unique environment that's worlds away from other PC racing games.



You Got the Look

The look of DIRT TRACK RACING will be familiar to veterans of Ratbag's previous racing effort, POWERSLIDE, as each uses the same graphical engine. It again does the job more than adequately, with well-drawn – yet still blocky – muscle cars, and a host of depressingly atmospheric rural racetracks. At the same time, however, the engine is still rather colorless. Let's put it this way: It renders all the browns and blacks that make up the standard dirt track in a way that would make the people at id Software proud.

Racing games just don't come any better than this. The "bedlam on wheels" races, fantastic career mode, and outstanding Internet multiplayer support make DIRT TRACK RACING a good bet for anyone who likes to hook a wheel and pedal set to their PC. And at a retail price of less than $20, you'll have plenty of cash left over for a big bag of chaw. CGW

HIS PRICES ARE IN-SANE! Budget shoppers will love the cars on sale here. Don't expect to pay more than $500 for your first dirt track racer. You can't buy a headlight in NEED FOR SPEED: HIGH STAKES for that sort of scratch.



CGW RATED

PROS
Each event is packed with more mayhem than a dozen NASCAR races.

CONS
Like Ratbag's earlier POWERSLIDE, this is *not* a game for control freaks.

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz MMX, 32MB RAM, DirectX 6.0-compatible sound and video cards, 8X CD-ROM drive, 60MB hard drive space.
Recommended Requirements: Pentium 233MHz MMX, 64MB RAM, 3D-accelerator video card (most current chipsets supported), 220MB hard drive space.
3D Support: Direct3D, Glide. **Multiplayer Support:** Up to 10 players via LAN, TCP/IP.
Publisher: WizardWorks • **Developer:** Ratbag • $20 • www.wizworks.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

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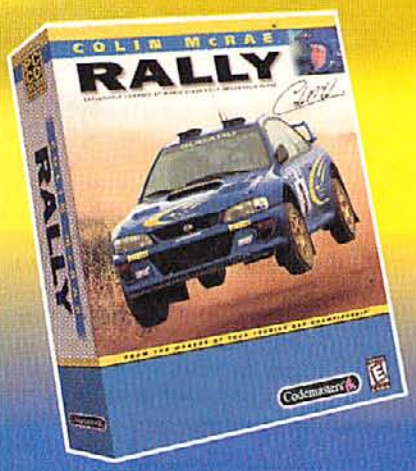
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All the Thrills of Motorcycle Racing, Without the Asphalt Burns and Crazy Insurance Premiums

Sit Down and Hang On

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

SUPERBIKE 2000

reviewed by Greg Fortune

I don't know what's in the water at EA, but they should bottle it and sell it to other publishing houses. What they do best is make superior games, and SUPERBIKE 2000 is certainly a superior game. Accessible to novice and seasoned riders alike, this game truly captures the essence of what makes motorcycle racing exciting.

Some Assembly Required

Talk to a racing engineer and you'll find they speak their own language. From gear ratios to tire compounds, you'd be amazed at the diligence required to keep one of these machines tuned for a sprint to the checkered flag. SUPERBIKE 2000 lets you choose between having the details managed for you or becoming a control freak, with many levels of control in between. Hey, if you want to stretch out third gear, that's your choice.

In talking about the tracks, I'm going to focus on the one I know best, Laguna Seca in Monterey, CA. The first time I did a lap around Laguna Seca in SUPERBIKE 2000, I had a very strong feeling of déjà vu. You see, a few years back I actually worked for the SCCA at Laguna Seca on race weekends. I've walked that track many times, and let me tell you, I was stunned at how realistically the track is modeled in this game. Stunned. From turn three leading around the back of the course, to the corkscrew, to infamous turn nine, this *is* Laguna Seca. Now, you too can find out why this is one of the premier road-racing courses in the world. Doing free practice laps, you can almost imagine that it's a sunny Friday afternoon in Monterey. It's as close as you'll come without a pit pass or a sponsor.

Need Some Help, Sparky?

Also welcome is the number and variety of assists available to those new to racing bikes. With all assists turned on, I could probably teach my cat to pilot a bike around a track. On the other end of the spectrum, it's clear that the people who really ride these machines are superhuman. Acceleration, shifting, and braking are all perfectly modeled. Come into a corner too fast, and you'll slide right out of the apex like a wet watermelon seed. Brake early, lean into the turn with proper body position, roll the throttle on as you pass the apex, and you'll glide through the corners like a gentle spring breeze. Panic and grab the brakes with the bike kicked over in a turn, and you'll be picking your machine up off the ground.

The exhilarating sense of speed is one of SUPERBIKE 2000's best elements. Even without the assists, I had an easy time telling when I was going too fast or too slow. After kicking all the difficulty settings up, I decided to try a trick that I saw pro rider Kenny Roberts do many times. Kenny would come flying through a corner and roll up onto the apex burm, which is a raised concrete patch on the inside of the corner, covered with nasty little ridges. Most riders would either vibrate like a jackhammer or eat it right there in the corner when facing the burm, but not Kenny. He'd just downshift, grab some throttle, lift his front tire about six inches off the track, and ride through the corner on his back wheel. Yes, SUPERBIKE 2000 will let you ride like that and no I'm not that good. Kenny, you're still my hero.

WIDE ANGLES The replay system allows you to view your race from a vartiety of angles, which is both entertaining and informative.



HEAD OVER BARS You can race from multiple vantage points, including third-person and the ever so fun over-the-bars cam. It's a little more challenging racing this way, but it sure is fun.



Blue Flag Special

If you like racing games and/or motorcycles, you shouldn't pass up this title. It's beautiful, stable, and a whole lot of fun. If racing games in the past have left you cold, give this one a try. The addictiveness of SUPERBIKE 2000 may just be enough to convert you. CGW

CATCHING AIR THE HARD WAY The physics model includes crash dynamics. If you've ever wondered how a superbike performs while it's flipping end over end into a guard rail, here's your chance to find out.



CGW RATED

PROS
Great game, all around.

CONS
This space intentionally left blank.

Requirements: 233MHz processor, 32MB RAM, 300MB hard drive space, 4x CD-ROM. **Recommended Requirements:** 266MHz processor, 64MB RAM, 8x CD-ROM, 8MB graphics accelerator. **3D Support:** Direct 3D **Multiplayer Support:** 2-8 players via LAN and Internet.

Publisher: EA Sports • **$40** • **www.easportssuperbike.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

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QUICK HITS

MIND ROVER



Every year at places like MIT, contests are held between robots. The tasks range from bumping robots out of an arena to running a maze. If you've ever had a yen to build robots like those – and maybe toss in a rocket launcher for good measure – then MIND ROVER is for you.

MIND ROVER is both a strategy game and a "software toy." You design robots by picking attributes like propulsion type, motors, sensors, weapons, and so on. However, the real heart of the game is tying all the various parts together with "wires." You do this in a sort of virtual breadboard, and the wires are really circuits with conditions and outcomes you set. For example, you might set the radar to tell the steering to move toward an object when it sees something. With some practice, you can program some pretty complex behaviors. Unfortunately, the debugging tools are almost nonexistent. After you build your robot, you test it in various scenarios, but they almost never work on the first try. So you have to puzzle out each connection to figure out the problem.

★★★☆☆

The scenarios range from simple races around tracks to actual combat. From the scale of things, the robots are only a little larger than remote-controlled cars, and most of the contests take place onboard a fictional space station. After you've exhausted the canned scenarios, you can import robots created by other users and compete against them. It's not exactly multiplayer, but it can be pretty unpredictable.

The game is cool, educational, and fun, and Cognitoy has done an excellent job of supporting it with downloadable add-ons. You can only order MIND ROVER directly from the Cognitoy Web site and there's a goofy, morally-objectionable pyramid discount scheme in which you hand out email addresses so the company can spam your friends with sales pitches. If you buy the game, make sure you download the 1.02 patch, which fixes some nasty launch crash bugs. *–Loyd Case*

Genre: Strategy • **Publisher:** Cognitoy • **Developer:** Cognitoy • $45 • www.cognitoy.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone; animated violence.

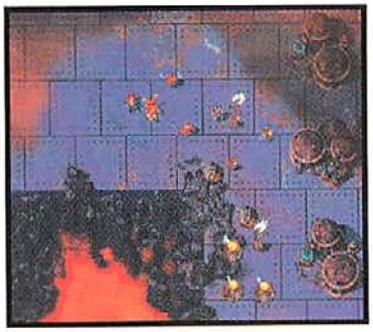
TOTAL ANNIHILATION: KINGDOMS, THE IRON PLAGUE

Genre: Strategy • **Publisher:** GT Interactive **Developer:** Cavedog • $20 • www.cavedog.com • **ESRB Rating:** Teen; animated blood and violence.

When in doubt, add more guns. That seems to be the theory behind THE IRON PLAGUE, the add-on to Cavedog's semi-sequel TOTAL ANNIHILATION: KINGDOMS. While it does a fair job of adding nifty items and missions (as expansion packs are expected to do), that's all it is: a fair job.

★★★☆☆

The main additions are a 25-mission campaign and a new, fifth-side Creon. Creon likes technology and not magic, which means that all your little faeries and mages are replaced with slightly-bigger, steam-driven automatons or guys with guns. Creon might be a little *too* cool, though; combine their gun-toting units with the most powerful defensive structure in the game (the Prismatic Mirror, a laser-tower on speed), and you have a nigh-invulnerable base. You're gonna need to rush a Creon player before the first Prismatic Mirror gets built.



Internet-abhorring grognards will get a ton of new maps, all downloadable units released to date, the much-needed 2.0 patch that greatly improves performance, and other online goodies that Cavedog has released. Not-very-wired TA: KINGDOMS fans will dig this pack. Otherwise, you'll have to ask yourself if you really want bigger zeppelins and more tanks with your zombies in your RTS. *–Thierry Nguyen*

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS: DEVIL'S BRIDGE

Genre: Tactical Simulation • **Publisher:** TalonSoft • **Developer:** Illusion Softworks • $30 • www.talonsoft.com • **ESRB Rating:** Mature; animated blood, gore, and violence.



Offering the diehard HIDDEN & DANGEROUS fan nine new wonderfully designed missions spread across three campaigns, DEVIL'S BRIDGE is sabotaged, River Kwai-style, by just about as many bugs as the original, some obnoxiously-slow load times, and finicky VooDoo 3 support.

★★☆☆☆

The missions take place in Poland, Southern Greece, and the besieged city of Bastogne, and include objectives such as sneaking your four-man squad of British SAS commandos behind enemy lines to rescue captured agents, stealing top-secret jet aircraft, or blowing vital bridges. Each DB mission plays at an extremely challenging level, even for old-school tactical sims/shooters. Alternating between the tactical map and action screens becomes more complex due to the multiple objectives of most missions. The German troops' AI has been beefed up, so there's no more waltzing behind an unsuspecting bad guy and popping a cap without consequences; try that now and you'll only invite nearby grenade-tossing sentries to the party.

New weapons like Thompson submachine guns, German Parabellum sidearms, and M1 Garand rifles are welcome, but TalonSoft goofed by not including the one feature fans really wanted: bug fixes. This expansion pack is almost as buggy as the original game, and sports hard lockups that occur when you skirt the edge of the map, and characters that can get stuck in ravines until you surrender control of them and have another squaddie command them to move.

All in all, DEVIL'S BRIDGE is a decent expansion, but only if you enjoy overly challenging action/strategy combos, tactical simulations, or are just a fan of H&D. If this doesn't describe you, you're better off burning this bridge behind you. *–Raphael Liberatore*


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Pentium III vs. Athlon

In this corner: the undefeated champion, weighing in at 800MHz, the master of disaster that still dominates the gaming world...Pentium III. In the other corner, in leopard-skin shorts, eyeing the competition hungrily, the 800MHz Athlon. Can the cocky contender beat the reigning ruler for the title of top gaming CPU? To find out, we brought in two almost identical systems from one source: Alienware, which specializes in gaming PCs. We then put them through a torture test of system benchmarks and actual game testing. As your referee and color commentator, we can say that both systems put up a helluva fight, and we were a bit surprised by the results.

by Dave Salvator and Ken Brown

The following will be a three-round fight. Unfortunately, you won't be able to see the round marker when she introduces each one.

Round one will establish stability. Up until now, AMD systems have been crash-prone when using a SCSI controller with a Vortex2-based sound card. But Alienware's AMD system uses an MSI motherboard and EIDE storage components. Even though their systems have Vortex2-based Aureal cards, our evaluation rig aced all of its tests without a complaint. Alienware's Intel-based Area-51 was also rock-solid, so score this one a tie.

Round two deals with clock-speed performance. As you're doubtlessly aware, Intel and AMD have been struggling mightily to beat each other's clock speeds (see our story in Read.Me). At press time, AMD had the lead on Intel with the availability of 850MHz machines (which we also tested). If you compare just the 800MHz numbers, Intel still maintains a *slight* clock-for-clock performance lead, but that lead starts to fade when you consider that Alienware's Athlon 850-based Area 51: Aurora is $400 cheaper than their Pentium-III machine. This round was close, but by performance numbers goes to Intel.

Round three is price vs. performance. The only area where Intel still has the edge over AMD is in SIMD floating-point performance. Clock for clock, Intel was 20 percent faster in our 3D WinBench 2000 Processor Test, which exercises the CPU's floating-point SIMD hardware with a very high triangle-count scene. However, the two processors were close in nearly every other measure of system performance–most importantly, 3D GameGauge scores. Given that, the focus turns to price, and on this count Alienware's Athlon-based Aurora clearly holds the advantage, coming in at $600 less and packing in twice the system memory than the Pentium-III system. That puts Aurora on top with a TKO.

How They Stack Up

	Rating	3D GameGauge Score	RE*VOLT (1600x900x32, 24-bit textures, triple-buffered)	EXPENDABLE (1600x900x32, triple-buffered)	3D WinBench 2000 (1024x768x32)	Price
Alienware 800 MHz Pentium-II	★★★★	60.9	59.9	38.2	65.9	$3,999
Alienware 800MHz Athlon	★★★★½	59.2	60.7	43.8	65.2	$3,399
Dell XPS800	★★★★★	62.8	60.7	43.0	68.2	$3,650

Both Alienware systems ripped through our testing with nary a hiccup. We tested using ZD's complete set of benchmarking tools for each system component, Windows performance, and games performance. Since we didn't find any irregularities in the numbers, we distilled the results to give you the most pertinent info.

We give the nod (and it was close) to the Athlon-based Aurora, because it stacked up very well in 3D GameGauge testing versus the Pentium-III-based Area 51; it packed twice as much system memory, and was $600 cheaper. But either system will keep you in the groove, and gaming very smoothly at high resolutions. If you're set on getting a Pentium-III-based box, Alienware's 800MHz Pentium-III-based Area 51 is a burner, and was dead even with the 850MHz Athlon-based Aurora in 3D GameGauge testing. However, Dell's Pentium-III offering has the 64MB DDR GeForce card and a lower price tag (by virtue of Dell's huge volume).

What's in the Box?

Both systems come loaded for bear, and include more than what you'll see here. Head to www.alienware.com for more details.

Alienware 800MHz Pentium-III

Memory	128MB PC800 RDRAM
3D Card	ASUS V6800, 32MB DDR SDRAM
Monitor	Viewsonic GS790 19"
Sound Card	Diamond MonsterSound MX400
Speakers	Klipsch ProMedia 4.0 THX
CD-ROM	Pioneer 10X/40X DVD
Other Storage	HP 9100i CD-R/W
DVD Decoder	Hardware
Joystick	Microsoft SideWinder Precision Pro
Gamepad	Microsoft SideWinder Gamepad



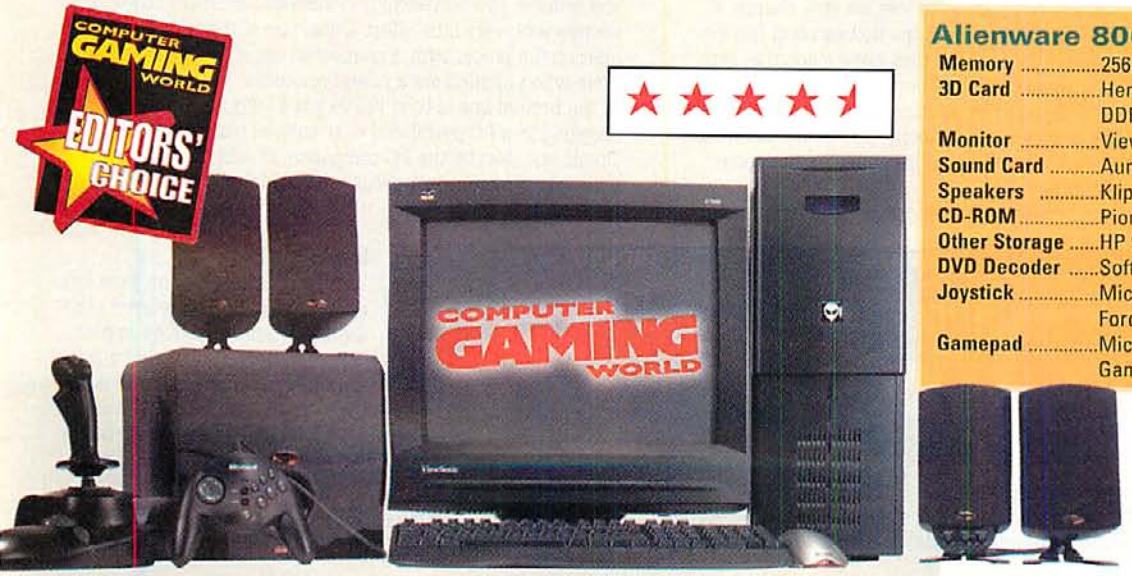
System Speeds and Feeds

✓ = EDGE

AMD		Intel
850 MHz	**Highest Clocking Speed**	800 MHz
128 KB	**L1 Cashe Size**	32 KB
512 KB, off-die, variable speed	**L2 Cache Size, Speed, Type**	512 KB, on-die, full clock speed ✓
200 MHz, 1.6GB/sec ✓	**Front-side bus interface speed*** *Speed at which CPU talks to system memory interface	133 MHz, 1.1GB/sec
PC100 SDRAM, 800MB/sec	**Memory Type, Peak Data Rate**	RAMBUS, 1.6GB/sec ✓
2X	**AGP Interface**	4X ✓

NUMBERS GAME: On paper, Intel's components are still faster, but Via's KX133 for the Athlon chipset will soon support AGP 4X and PC133 SDRAM system memory. Intel's 840 chipset – which was shipping but hard to find at press time – supports multiple channels of RDRAM, which can allow peak system data rates to jump to 3.2GB/sec.

How do these CPUs stack up in terms of overall system performance? This is a difficult question, because it's not just a matter of pure CPU horsepower. You also have to consider the system chipset, and the speeds of the Level 2 (L2) cache, front-side bus, system memory, and AGP port. So who's got the goods? Intel does hold a chipset advantage on paper (as seen in the table, above), and this advantage showed up in one isolated 3D WinBench test, but the truth is that it was barely noticeable in actual game testing, even at very high resolutions. The reason? Even with 32MB DDR SDRAM GeForce-based 3D cards—the fastest 3D gun going—both systems' chipsets can process data fast enough even at 1600x900x32-bit, so that the 3D card is still the "bottleneck." At 60+frames per second, you should be very happy—but in this case, the 3D card is what's keeping frame rates from going that much higher.



Alienware 800MHz Athlon

Memory	256MB PC133 SDRAM
3D Card	Hercules 3D Prophet, 32MB DDR SDRAM
Monitor	Viewsonic E790B 19"
Sound Card	Aureal Vortex II Super-Quad
Speakers	Klipsch ProMedia 4.0 THX
CD-ROM	Pioneer 10X/40X DVD
Other Storage	HP 9100i CD-R/W
DVD Decoder	Software
Joystick	Microsoft SideWinder Force Feedback Pro
Gamepad	Microsoft SideWinder Gamepad

Photos by Hayden Houser/ DIGITAL CLARITY

Under the Hood



BY LOYD CASE

Pinhead Ergonomics

Why Can't PC Connections Be as Easy as Consoles?

Not long ago, while hooking up a couple of console games for my daughters, I was struck by the thought of how easy it was to connect everything. I forgot about that thought until recently. What happened was that my desktop (the wooden one, not the one on my screen) decided to get my attention by bonking me on the head while I was trying to align a DIN adapter. A few colorful expletives later, I peered at the connector and realized that one of the pins was horribly bent. Now, a mini-DIN adapter is actually a relatively friendly connector, all things considered, but it's still all too easy to munge a pin. Far worse are Ultra-Wide SCSI connectors—68 teeny pins that beg to be damaged. The connectors for any of the Dreamcast connections, on the other hand, are idiot-proof and a child could (literally) hook it up properly.

Then there's USB. Excuse me, I need to take a gulp of Maalox before tackling this. Ah, can't beat that taste. Now where were we? Oh yeah...

Voodoo Ergonomics

I'm very happy that many PC monitors now have USB connections—but why are they on the back of the display? In some cases, they're on the side, buried in small recesses that force me to lift a heavy monitor to plug them in. Having USB connections on monitors makes up a bit for the fact that the vast majority of PCs *put the connectors on the back of the system*. Yeah, I know that's how motherboards are built, but is this an excuse for the big OEMs to be lazy? (There are exceptions, such as Compaq and Apple). Having the connector in an inaccessible location is aggravated by the connector design. It's a symmetrical shape, but the internal connector is asymmetrical. On top of that, there are no tactile cues, so it's a coin toss as to whether you'll align it correctly. Murphy's Law dictates that you have, more or less, an 80% chance of aligning it wrong. I'm talking about the downstream (peripheral) connector here. Why couldn't they have made that connector like the upstream connectors on some monitors? You know the one—it's shaped like an irregular pentagon, and it's nearly impossible to connect incorrectly. You would think that both ends of the cable would use this connector, but some engineer thought differently.

Then there are, of course, software issues. The latest minor debacle is DirectX 7.0. I ran into this when checking out Microsoft's new Precision Racing Wheel. It wouldn't work with NASCAR 3; the game was getting values way out of whack with what it expected. Oops, it turned out that USB/HID device support was broken in DirectInput as of DirectX 7.0. Didn't this happen in DirectX 6.0 and DirectX 5.0? Will this happen again in DirectX 8.0? Where's that Maalox?

We've got a long way to go before plugging in a PC peripheral is as easy as plugging in a Dreamcast. Maybe PC companies should hire some nine-year-olds.

And Another Thing...

Power connectors are a royal pain, too. There are two types of device power connectors: the larger one—with four large holes for very large pins—which is used to connect hard drives; and the smaller, compact one that's used mostly for floppy and Zip drives. Why doesn't the industry move to the more compact, floppy-style power connector? It's much easier to connect and remove. I've successfully destroyed hard-drive power connectors with very little effort. Once, two of the female pins (the ones on the power-supply connector) remained with the hard drive when I pulled out a power connector.

The bottom line is this: We've got a long way to go before plugging in a PC peripheral is as easy as plugging in a Dreamcast. Maybe the PC companies should hire some nine-year-olds. Now, if you'll excuse me, I think the Maalox bottle is beckoning again.



The Dreamcast's controller plugs make connecting/disconnecting controllers a no-brainer – they just work. PC connectors still suffer from bent and broken pins. They could learn a lot from their console brethren.

Shameless Plug

And speaking of plugs, I get lots of email from regular readers asking me about information in past columns. Now you can find a lot of that information compiled in a single place: my recent book. It's called *Building the Ultimate Game PC*, and is published by Brady. The ISBN number is 0-7897-2204-6. If you pick it up, drop me a line and let me know what you think. CGW

WARNING

SOUND QUALITY MAY BE TOO GRAPHIC FOR SOME USERS!



Video games may be graphic, but until you've played them with a set of Yamaha YST-MS30 speakers, you won't get the full picture. That's because Yamaha's exclusive Advanced Active Servo technology elevates thundering explosions, bone-cracking punches and screaming race cars up to catastrophic proportions. And just wait until you hear what this system can do for your favorite MP3 and CD music. This is no time to be squeamish. Get a Yamaha YST-MS30 speaker system and experience the full force of your computer's sound.

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Tech Medics



You've Got Questions, We've Got Answers

by Loyd Case and Dave Salvator

Wounded on the technological front? Our medics may be able to patch you up and get you back into the action. Send your gaming-related technical questions to cgw_hardware@zd.com.

One Gigabyte Question

I was planning to buy a Pentium-III 733MHz processor, but AMD and Intel just announced processors at 1.1GHz! Will a P-III 733 be able to run new games for the next couple of years, or should I wait till Christmas and get one of these new processors running at one gigabyte?

This is an eternal question in a society where the pace of technology outstrips the pace of our salary increases. You should know that CPUs that run at over a Gigahertz probably won't be widely available until summer or fall, and they will be expensive. However, if you get a 733MHz CPU today, it will give you two or more years of gaming pleasure. By the time 1GHz arrives, we'll be talking about 1.6GHz, and so on. At some point, you just have to put a stake in the ground and tell yourself, "Now is the time to buy."

LCD Displays

I am mightily tempted by those 18-inch flat-panel displays. However, I know that some LCDs don't handle resolution resizing, and I'm also concerned with the picture quality. The laptop monitors that I've seen don't look as good as CRTs. So, if size weren't an issue, would an LCD be preferable to a CRT?

Desktop LCD monitors don't have the limitations that many notebook PCs have. For example, many notebook screens simply use the actual number of pixels for a given resolution. If the native resolution is 1024x768, and you run at 640x480, you get a pitifully shrunken image in the center of the screen. Desktop LCDs, on the other hand, can interpolate pixels; this results in a slightly "grainy" image, but it generally works well. Note that even good LCDs often lack the color saturation and image quality of a good CRT, though.

Celeron + i820 = ?

Can I use a Celeron in an 820 motherboard, like the Asus P3C-E or P3C-2000?

No. The 820 chipsets support a minimum front-side bus clock rate of 100MHz. Since current Celerons use a 66MHz FSB, it won't run in an 820 motherboard.

Cool Running

I'm interested in putting some additional cooling fans in my PC case. How should they be installed?

What you want is airflow through the case. Power-supply fans in modern ATX-based systems exhaust air out of the case. So if you place an additional fan in the front, make sure it pulls air into the case. If you place the fan along the back panel, you can orient it either way.

Mix n' Match RAM

I was thinking about getting some ECC SDRAM, but it comes in different speeds such as 6, 7, and at 8ns. I have a chance to get a great deal on a 6ns piece, but I can only get one.

Can you mix RAM pieces if they're different speeds? Say they're both PC100 SDRAM ECC DIMMs, except one runs at 6ns, and the other 8ns—will they run together?

Yes, they'll both run fine, and both at 100MHz. The 6ns RAM may handle higher front-side bus speeds than the 8ns, but if you're not over-clocking, both run at the same speed. The 6ns RAM is simply capable of running faster.

TECHTIP Here's a tip that will make adding new hardware go a lot faster. If you have plenty of space on your hard drive, take your Windows 98 CD, and copy the contents of the X:\Win98 (where X: is your CD-ROM drive letter) folder to a folder on your hard drive, like, oh, C:\Win98. By doing this, every time your machine asks you for your Windows CD-ROM, you can just point to this folder rather than having to go hunt the frickin' CD-ROM yet again. And, when the day comes, and it always does, that you have to reinstall Windows because your machine is just too damned unstable to do any meaningful gaming, you can actually run Windows setup from your hard drive. Just remember to create a folder somewhere on your hard disk and copy the contents of the C:\windows\command folder. That folder contains the DOS commands you'll need to nuke your old Windows folder and begin anew.

WHAT WOULD THE 3D PROPHET DDR-DVI BECOME IF YOU TOOK THE GLOVES OFF?



The world's fastest 3D accelerator - made even faster: The Falcon Northwest Special Edition

Includes all the standard features of the Hercules 3D Prophet DDR-DVI™ *PLUS:*

350 MHz Double Data Rate video memory

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Individual heatsinks on each memory chip

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Seperate fan power source reduces noise and lowers AGP bus power consumption.

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-Computer Gaming World, Nov. '99

"the Falcon Voodoo3 3500SE is undeniably the jewel in the 3dfx crown"

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Killer Rigs



Power Rig

Component	Manufacturer	Price	The Skinny
Motherboard	Asus P3C-E	$200	AGP 4x
CPU	Intel Coppermine 800	$730	It's the top of the heap, for now
Memory	128MB of PC800 RDRAM	$850	RAMBUS
NEW **Disk Controller**	Adaptec 29160	$260	Slightly faster, but also has PCI 64 support
Primary Graphics	Hercules Prophet DDR-DVI	$300	DDR SDRAM and T&L support
3.5" Floppy Drive	Teac	$20	You still have to have one
Hard Drive	Quantum Atlas 10k	$680	A screamer that runs a bit warm
Backup	Creative DVD-RAM drive	$599	5.2 gigs of backup
CD-ROM	Pioneer 6x SCSI DVD	$160	New Pioneer Slot Drive DVD
Monitor	Mitsubishi DiamondPro 2020u	$1,250	Perfectly flat; good USB support
Primary Audio	Sound Blaster Live Platinum	$175	For four-speaker DirectSound, A3D, and EAX
NEW **Speakers**	Boston Acoustics BA4800	$199	Loud, clean, uncolored, and fabulous
Modem	3Com SDSL modem	$400	DSL at last
Networking	3COM Etherlink 10/100 PCI	$60	For fragging my buddies
Networking Hub	Netgear DS108	$170	Multiplayer & DSL modem support
YY Minicube Case	Yeong Yang	$213	Lots of cooling
Power Supply	PC Power and Cooling Turbocool 300	$99	More power, Scotty!
Keyboard	Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro	$59	Switched back from Logitech
Mouse/Pointing Device	Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer	$65	No balls!
		Total w/o Game Controllers	$6,489
Flight Joystick	CH F16 Combatstick USB	$65	It just feels right
Rudder Pedals	CH Pro Pedals USB	$100	Nearly perfect foot placement
Driving Controls	ECCI CDS 4000	$1,250	For the serious sim driver
Gamepad	Interact Hammerhead FX	$40	DualShock-like controller
		Total	$7,944

The Fine Print: All recommendations based on actual evaluations and testing. Prices listed are average low quotes from Web price search engines like **www.computershopper.com** or **www.pricewatch.com**. - *Lists compiled by Dave Salvator and Loyd Case.*

Lean Machine

Component	Manufacturer
Motherboard	Asus P3B-F
CPU	Pentium III/600E
Memory	128MB PC100 SDRAM
Disk Controller	Built-in UDMA/33
Primary Graphics	Guillemot Prophet (SDR)
Floppy Drive	Teac
NEW **Hard Drive**	IBM Deskstar 34GXP 13.1GB drive
CD-ROM/DVD	Pioneer DVD-114
Monitor	Optiquest Q95
Primary Audio	Aureal SQ2500
Speakers	Boston Acoustics BA-635
Modem	Actiontec PCI Call-Waiting Modem
Case	Elan Vital T10-AB
Power Supply	Built-in, 235W
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard
Mouse/Pointing Device	Logitech USB Wheel Mouse
Joystick	Logitech Wingman Extreme Digita
Gamepad	Gravis Gamepad USB

KILLER RIGS IN A BOX

Want a full-bore gaming beast without having to build it? We've got you covered. These two systems tested very well and will put you into the fray – without your ever having to charge-up your electric screwdriver.



Power Rig

Dell's Dimension XPS 800 impressed us with both its features and performance. The Pentium-III 800MHz system features a GeForce-based 3D card with 64MB of DDR SDRAM, a set of Altec-Lansing THX-certified speakers, and 128MB of RDRAM. This Dimension nailed a 3D GameGauge score of 62fps, the highest score we've seen to date. At press time, Dell was quoting lead times of 7-10 days for these boxes, due to the tight supply of RDRAM memory and Intel 820 chipsets, but its Dimension is worth the wait.

Dell Dimension XPS 800 ▪ $3,650 ▪ (800) 915-3355 ▪ www.dell.com



Lean Machine

Hypersonic was a first-time entrant into our Ultimate Gaming Machine roundup last December, but its Silver Bullet system came, saw, and kicked ass in our "Bang for the Buck" category. The Silver Bullet is adorned with a Pentium-III 600MHz CPU, 128MB of SDRAM, Hercules' GeForce 3D card with 32MB of DDR SDRAM, and a 15GB hard drive. This system comes in at just over $2,000, and for that price, it packs one helluva wallop.

Hypersonic Silver Bullet ▪ $2,034 ▪ (800) 520-0498 ▪ www.hypersonic-pc.com

WHICH 3D CARD SHOULD I BUY?

Choosing the right 3D card depends on your CPU and your motherboard, so we have two recommendations for you:

If your CPU is a Pentium 233MHz or slower, or your motherboard is all-PCI (no AGP), or you've got a motherboard-down AGP graphics chip with no AGP slot, then get 3dfx's Voodoo3 3000 PCI board. At just under $150, the V3 3000 delivers great price/performance, and will do a very good job with current games, and a good job with games coming out soon. And the best part is that when you swap in a new motherboard/CPU, you can migrate the Voodoo3 board to the new setup and use it there until you decide to get an AGP-based 3D card.

Price	The Skinny
$125	5 PCI slots, Softmenu, 440BX – ready for the P-III
$445	P-III/600
$150	128MB, squeezed in
$0	Gets the job done
$225	Went for 32-bits + T&L
$20	Still gotta have it
$148	IBM's low cost, fast drive
$105	Slot-drive DVD
$350	Solid 19" monitor at a budget price
$99	A3D and clean audio for under a C-note
$70	Still the best low-cost speakers going
$80	Solid performance, good price
$75	Back to the old-familiar
$0	Again, gets the job done
$24	Cheap, nice add-on buttons
$30	Better than the "gaming" mouse
$39	Cheap, but very solid 3D stick
$30	Solid, basic gamepad
Total	**$2,005**



If your rig's motherboard has an AGP slot, then go with Creative's 3D Annihilator Pro, which goes for around $270. Admittedly pricey, this GeForce-based board uses DDR SDRAM memory to keep its four pipelines fed and happy. If you can't stomach a $300 investment, then consider Creative's 3D Blaster TNT2 Ultra, which is available now for around $150.

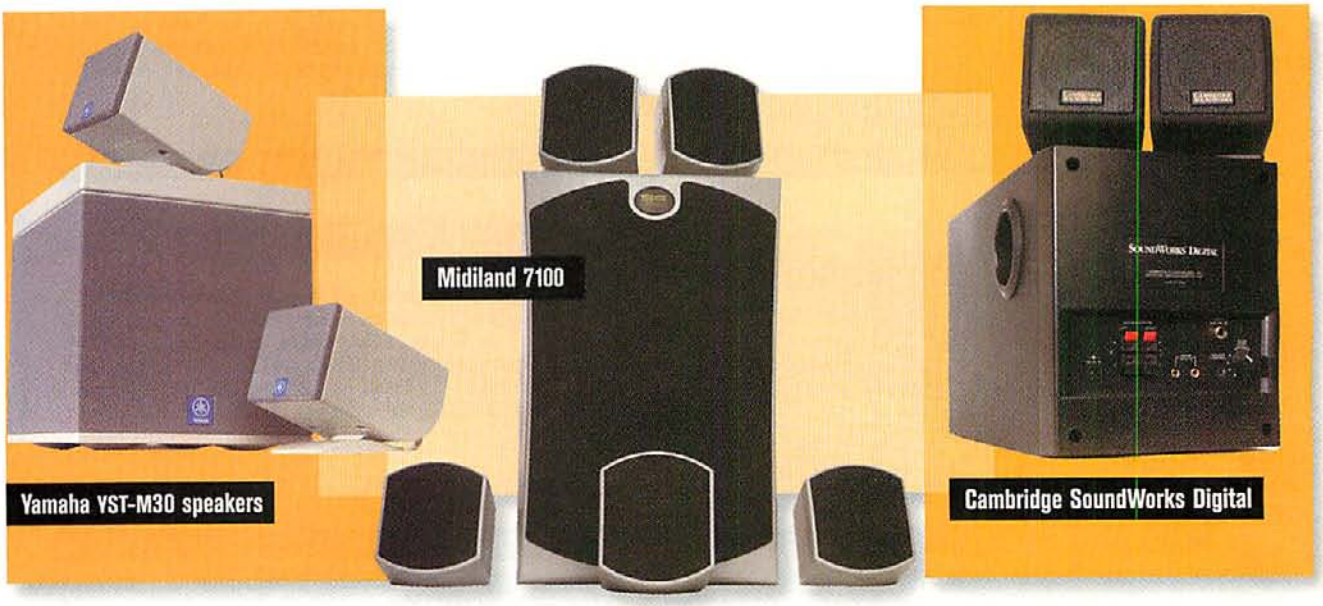
Even if you're running a Pentium-II 233 or 266MHz CPU, when you upgrade motherboard/CPU, you can migrate either of these cards into your new setup – and they've got room to grow with whichever CPU you decide to use.

GET IT TOGETHER

So how do you put all this stuff together? Head over to Loyd's PC Workshop page on GameSpot at www.gamespot.com/features/pc_workshop6/ for step-by-step instructions on how to get your killer rig up and running.

Speaker Roundup

PC Noisemakers



YAMAHA YST-M30 SPEAKERS

Price: $50
Manufacturer: Yamaha Corporation of America
Contact: www.yamaha.com

Designing good, low-cost speakers is as much an art form as an engineering exercise. In most cases, there are too many concessions made, and the YST-M30 is no exception. This three-speaker combo – amplifier/bass cube and two small satellites – delivers a mixed bag, with an odd emphasis on mid-range.

On top of that, our 10KHz test tone revealed nasty distortion at high frequencies, creating very unpleasant effects. Bass output is lacking, even with the "subwoofer" control cranked up. The one positive is that, at moderate volumes, the stereo imaging is sharp and well-defined. Games do fare a little better, but anything with loud explosions gets distorted if the volume is above three-quarters. If you watch DVD movies on your PC, these aren't the speakers for you.

We recommend spending a little more for the Boston Acoustics BA-635s, or the Yamaha YST-M28s. –*Loyd Case*

MIDILAND 7100

Price: $200
Manufacturer: MidiLand, Inc.
Contact: www.midiland.com

You want loud? When I played the live version of *Born in the USA*, these speakers got up to 105 decibels with some noticeable clipping, and 103 decibels with clean audio. It took a few minutes for my ears to recover. Getting to that point, however, was like navigating the maze in the original ZORK. You have to figure out what type of setup you want (Dolby Digital? Four-channel game audio?). Once you decide, you then need to set an unlabeled, four-position dip switch. These speakers are crying out for some form of digital input that will automatically switch soundstream types. With most PCI sound cards now having some form of digital audio output, digital input is now viable for speakers.

There is definitely some mid-range coloration. The 7100's sound much better on rock/pop music than purely acoustic jazz or classical. This makes them ideal for games, though, and they sound great when set up as a 4.1 system with a 3D sound card. DVD audio sounds pretty good, too. At $200, they're not a steal, but if you have a penchant for playing loud rock music – or just pumping up the volume in QUAKE III – then check 'em out. –*Loyd Case*

CAMBRIDGE SOUNDWORKS DIGITAL

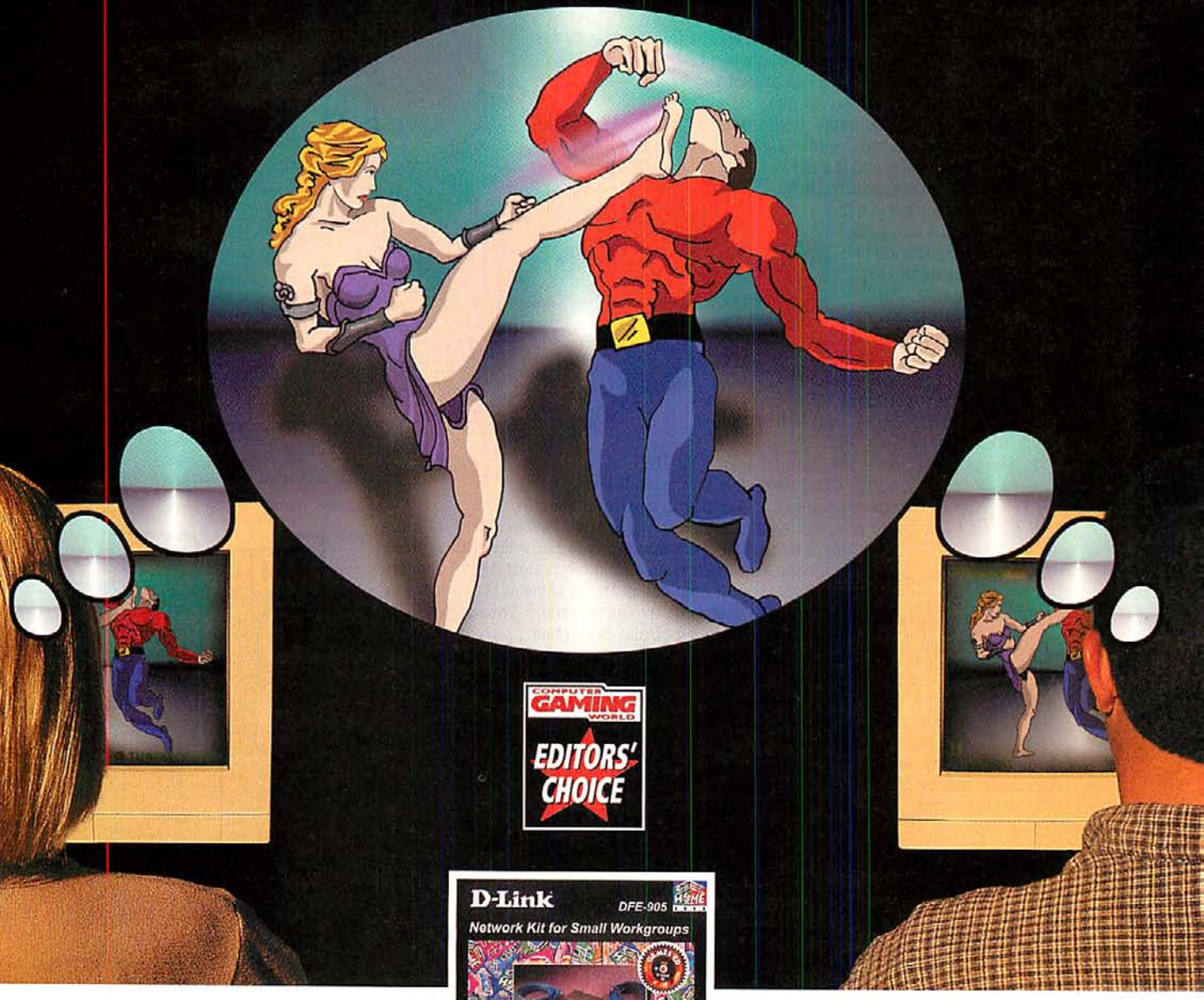
Price: $100
Manufacturer: Cambridge SoundWorks
Contact: www.hifi.com

Cambridge SoundWorks originated the idea of the very small satellites/woofer combination, and its MicroWorks are still some of the finest PC speakers available, both for clear uncolored sound and plenty of volume. The low-end SoundWorks speaker set – Cambridge's original offering – delivers good audio quality and impressive volume output, but lack the MicroWorks' tonal clarity.

Cambridge has revisited this design, adding digital-audio input to create the SoundWorks Digital. The low-wattage rating of these speakers – 8 watts per satellite and 22 watts for the woofer – belie the SoundWorks' volume output. Despite developing good volume, however, the SoundWorks still sound a bit muddy playing music, although it's not as noticeable with gaming audio. The S/PDIF digital connection works as advertised, though there wasn't any real difference between using the digital or analog inputs. Long story short, the SoundWorks sound good, but there are other low-cost offerings that sound better, like Boston Acoustics' BA-635s or Yamaha's YST-M28s. –*Dave Salvator*

Photos by Hayden Houser/DIGITAL CLARITY

Gratuitous Violence is 200 Times Faster With a D-Link Network Than With Online Games.



To get the Maximum performance out of a multi-user game, get off the Internet and get on a D-Link 10/100Mb Fast Ethernet Network. Up to 200 times faster than the Internet, and 10 times faster than other legacy networks. Easy to set up and install, a D-Link 10/100 Network In A Box comes with everything you need to build a Windows 95/98 Network.

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Inside STRATEGY

I Am a Social Leper

BY ROBERT COFFEY



robert_coffey@zd.com

THIS MAN IS AN ISLAND Pity poor Ruben Kincaid, passed out in the bathroom, doomed to live a friendless, lonely life because he's too much like me.

Gaming is supposed to be a joy, an escape from the day to day cares of the world, where socially inept misfits can believe for a few precious hours that they really *are* Blaugh the Gnome, warrior/mage supreme. It was true in the Doritos-drunk *AD&D* weekends of my high-school years, and it's been pretty much a constant during my adult life as a computer gaming shut-in—just one baby step away from relying on Meals on Wheels to keep me fed. Until now. Until THE SIMS. Until those heartless bastards at Maxis rubbed my face in my pathetic loserness, and sucked all the joy out of my worthless life.

So, other than losing the will to live, little in my life has changed.

It started when I made the cardinal mistake of THE SIMS—designing a Sim that more or less approximated me. Along with looking into a mirror after having a nice big bowl of Frosted Peyote Flakes for breakfast, this is one of the worst missteps you can make with your life. My Sim, Ruben Kincaid, was an almost too-perfect digital doppelganger, whose thirst for fun and neatness came at the expense of any desire to have friends or engage in activity. Thus began Ruben's tortuous slide into crippling virtual depression.

Art Too Closely Resembles Life in THE SIMS

Even a Sim with a low Outgoing rating will eventually feel the gnawing pangs of loneliness. While they might be able to stave off the urge for companionship longer than the social butterflies of the game, sooner or later they're going to want a friend. You'll find them—as I did my poor, shattered Ruben—sobbing on the couch after drugging themselves with long bouts of avid, but ultimately unsatisfying, cartoon viewing. My heart breaking for my little avatar, I had Ruben call up some neighbors, thinking "This'll fix things." It didn't. Things got worse.

See, once the neighbors came over, they had a great time—eating, talking, and even dancing. But they did it amongst themselves. Try as he might, Ruben could never successfully engage his guests in conversation or activity. He literally stood by as they utterly ignored him and his Social score plummeted. After a couple hours of pariahhood, Ruben succumbed to the easy charms of the TV, driving his would-be friends away as he refused to clean up the mess they made. After several hours of TV, Ruben passed out on the floor in the wee hours of the morning. Thank God Will Wright didn't include an option for suicide, for I completely expected to see Ruben stick his head in his brand-new oven, or throw himself in front of his carpool. I'm hoping a Sim psychiatrist moves nearby, before Ruben lashes out and obliterates the neighborhood.

As much as I enjoy playing THE SIMS, it has—through no fault of its own—damned me. Now my real-life days are a pathetic, frantic charade of friendliness and vivacity as I strive to avoid the fate of Ruben Kincaid. It's killing me. I can feel my cerebral cortex shriveling under the duress of all this panicky gaiety. The dreadful aftermath of creating a Sim-style Mini Me has plunged me deep into a steadily sucking spiral of desperation, anxiety, and crying jags the frequency and severity of which frighten my co-workers. Do not make my mistake. Make your Sim a complete human or face the horrific consequences.

All is darkness....terrible, terrible darkness...

Rob's Mix

1. *THE SIMS– In spite of it all.*
2. *NOX*
3. *UNREAL TOURNAMENT*
4. *Laurie Anderson's* United States of America
5. *Henry Fool*

From CPU to Tabletop?

It's generally the other way around, but believe it or not, Bungie's MYTH universe has been translated into a Y2K compliant version requiring only pencils, paper, and some funny-shaped dice. Steve Jackson Games has converted this *CGW* Hall of Fame title into a GURPS (Generic Universal Role-Playing System) framework, allowing gamers to create their own tabletop campaigns and to play as their favorite characters. For gamers interested in using Bungie's Fear & Loathing tools for creating PC scenarios, the book has a fairly detailed section that should alleviate some of the trepidation nascent designers might feel employing such powerful tools. While it probably won't tear diehard MYTH fanatics away from their PCs, they might well appreciate the nice job the book does fleshing out the game universe. Check out www.bunjie.com/store or www.sjgames.com for more info.

Inside HOMEBREW GAMING

Bargain Game Hunter

T. Byrl Finds Cheap Games and a Cool Tool for THE SIMS!

As you learned in the last installment, I'm a notorious skinflint. I'll waste hours each month digging through various bargain bins to see if any new titles have fallen from grace. Most months I am greeted with the typical dreck, but lately things have become peculiar: Games are dropping to $20 or less only a few months after their release.

I struck the motherlode when I found JACK NICKLAUS 6: GOLDEN BEAR CHALLENGE at CompUSA for five bucks. That's right; five lousy dollars for a gorgeous golf game that is known for its excellent course editor. I've found over 200 user-made courses since purchasing GBC, and that's just the beginning. You can get everything from custom clubs to designer flags.

Fun as it is to play on real courses, some of the fantasy courses available are stunning in both their originality and execution. A favorite is Manuel Kellner's Gaulic Village, set in the cartoon world of *Asterix*. I was introduced to the world of *Asterix* in a college French class and it makes a terrific setting for a golf course. Each hole is populated with characters from the comic, and I've encountered obstacles ranging from a pack of wild boars crossing the fairway, to a Roman legion blocking the approach to a green. Every tree, bush, rock, and background screen is replaced by scanned images from various *Asterix* books, and the end result is highly entertaining.

In fact, the only bad thing about Gaulic Village is the 28+MB download. All GBC course downloads are on the large side of enormous, but most will leave you thinking that a second GBC-dedicated hard drive isn't such a bad idea. In any case, it beats paying for course expansion CDs every few months.

Activision's Golden Bears Den (**www.goldenbearsden.com**) teems with enough goodies to bring your cable modem to its knees. And if that's not enough, The Course Depot (**www.coursedepot.com**) hosts a variety of excellent GBC sites, including Puhman's Course Index. More than 200 GBC courses are available here, with full reviews and screenshots (equalling more than 2GB of downloads, in case you have a few months with absolutely nothing to do...).

T. Byrl's Mix

1. *UNREAL TOURNAMENT*
2. *NASCAR RACING 3*
3. *PLANESCAPE: TORMENT*
4. *BIONIC COMMANDO for the Game Boy Color*
5. *"If You Survive" by George Wilson*

BY T. BYRL BAKER



tbbaker@email.com

Cheap Thrills

I found a $5 copy of SiN sitting next to GBC and bought it out of morbid curiosity. A few hours of downloads later, I was having a blast. The game finally has been patched into the realm of playability, and the few user-made enhancements do much to address the remaining weak spots. Take the guns, for example. A single-pump Red Ryder has more audio punch than most of the pea-shooters in the original release. Awesund's Awesound Pak amends this deficiency nicely, as does Darklight2's HS-Sound files. My neighbors may never forgive me. These and other SiN mods are available at the SiN Post (www.sinpost.com).

You can pick up a copy of JANE'S FLEET COMMAND for under $20 now. Be sure to patch it and immediately go to the Warship Database Project site to download an enhanced database. The site jumps around a lot, but currently is located at members.xoom.com/Warship100/WDP. Whatever you do, don't pass up a bargain title just because it received lukewarm reviews. Chances are, in the time it took the game's price to tumble, patches and mods were released that change it into a worthy experience.

Simmer's Paradise

In the days of yore, when all that stood between me and a date was my Commodore 64, I used to play a game called LITTLE COMPUTER PEOPLE. I remember playing poker with the portly man inhabiting my television, wiping him out, and then sitting there in awe when he refused to play poker with me again for hours. Memories like that prompted my decision to buy THE SIMS the second it hit the shelves.

I hate many things about THE SIMS—like the porked time model that makes every action take about an hour of simulated time—but all quibbles aside, I'm still sitting there every night until 3 a.m. waiting to see what happens next.

My main gripe is that only one neighborhood can be active at any one time, and I don't want my wife reforming all the virtual slobs that reside in my little Hooverville. I finally solved the problem with ZeBlaster Systems Inc.'s GameBlazer (www.gameblazer.com). It has a "Swap and Play" feature that lets any number of users have their own neighborhoods. When THE SIMS is launched from the GameBlazer interface, the appropriate user files are added or removed before the game begins, and everyone is happy. The trial version lets two users establish neighborhoods for an unlimited time, while a $20 two-year subscription allows for unlimited users. GameBlazer works similarly with a number of other games, like SYSTEM SHOCK 2, BALDUR'S GATE, and HOMEWORLD, with support for new titles added continually.



NOT IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD GameBlazer lets you swap user files so gamers sharing a computer can each have their own neighborhood in THE SIMS.

Inside ACTION

BY THIERRY "SCOOTER" NGUYEN

Smoking Barrel Be Damned!

Too Many Guns and Not Enough Fisticuffs



thierry_nguyen@zd.com

There're too many guns nowadays. Lead-shooting guns, energy-shooting guns, guns that turn enemies into livestock, guns that cause the Inner Macarena to emerge from the target...it's just guns, guns, and more guns. Of course, with "first-person *shooter*" being the driving force behind this column, it looks like I wouldn't have any room to complain. Where the heck else can the genre go?

One word: melee.

Whether you think of me as a visionary or a hack, you have to admit: Guns are nice, but they're hardly surprising anymore. Everyone has variants of gun archetypes such as sniper rifles, shotguns, rapid-fire guns, and explosive-rocket guns. Other excuses for gun-based weaponry include magical spells, psionic skills, or swords/axes/hammers that somehow fling miniature versions of themselves toward flunkies. It's time to step away from the "trigger a weapon to toss out a projectile" and get back to basics, whether we strip down to bare fists or create weapons that call for swinging rather than firing.

Why did I even think of melee in the first place? Blame a combination of re-watching Bruce Lee's *Enter The Dragon* and reading Stan Sakai's *Usagi Yojimbo*. Take a look at other media, and you'll find that melee matches often surpass gunplay in terms of excitement. *The Matrix* had a few slick Hong-Kong style gunfights and stop-time effects, but the heart of that movie was the incredible martial arts scenes, such as Carrie-Ann Moss' acrobatics in the very beginning, or the amazing fight scene between Keanu Reeves and Lawrence Fishburne. Swords have always provided great entertainment, from early swashbuckling Errol Flynn adventures to *The Phantom Menace's* two-versus-one bout of Darth Maul, Qui-Gon, and Obi-Wan.

Melee combat seems to elicit both a sense of vulnerability and finesse. You have to actually get in-your-face for such scenes, and boy, getting kicked in the face sure smarts. The moments when you land a blow seem a lot more rewarding than when firing off a gun at a distance, which is why the final blow seems more climatic than the final gunshot in a movie. On the other hand, guns are essentially simple aim-and-shoot. If you're about to send me a letter about the skill required to fire one, don't. I've actually fired a few in real life, but none of that skill is involved when using a gun in a computer game.

The largest obstacle to the use of melee combat is the interface. DIE BY THE SWORD was a fine sword-fighting game, but the interface was way too complicated for most people to grasp. Guns model an arm; melee would require a larger range of movement and more body parts to model. I imagine that may be the reason why the hammer-as-true-melee idea for QUAKE got scrapped. Right now, we'd either have to get more button-friendly, or work on being dexterous enough to pull off mouse-keyboard combos. Both JEDI KNIGHT and HERETIC II did a good job with an easy-to-use yet maneuver-filled system of melee combat using mouse and keyboard. URBAN CHAOS had a workable hand-to-hand system; I wished the weapons hadn't overpowered that aspect. Looking forward, Bungie's ONI and Infinite Machine's NEW LEGENDS (by JEDI KNIGHT designer Justin Chin, no less!) look to be good candidates to tackle the melee task.

There will always be more shooters with nifty guns that can kill while serving you cocktails, and I'll still derive the same sick pleasure from sniping some poor halfwit a mile away. Yet, when a game offers me the chance to feel the same sense of raw combat that either Bruce Lee or Toshiro Mifune felt while engaging their opponents, I'm putting the gun down.



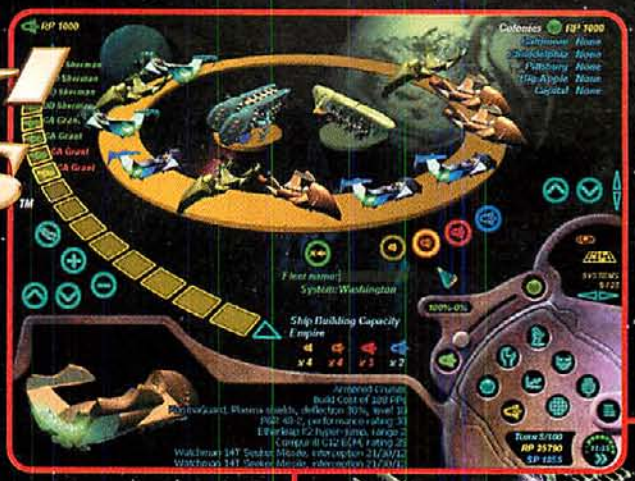
SIM JACKIE CHAN
ONI's melee combat may be just the kick in the head the action genre needs.

Scooter's Mix

1. Developing antisocial athlete Max Power to seduce my friend's single-mother Cherise Radocinovich in THE SIMS.
2. Pokémon Blue
3. The new Punisher comic book miniseries from the Preacher team (writer Garth Ennis and artist Steve Dillon).
4. UNREAL TOURNAMENT
5. PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

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Inside ADVENTURE/RPG

BY DESSLOCK

desslock@desslock.com

Got Them 3D-Engine Blues

The Next "Gold Box" Series Isn't Gonna Happen

In six years, SSI released nine successive *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* games using essentially the same engine. Nicknamed the "gold box" series, the games are still widely praised by RPG fans, even though the last game was produced in the early 1990s.

The series certainly proved to be commercially golden for SSI, as *AD&D* fans kept nabbing the games off retail shelves almost as quickly as SSI could mass-produce them. It's hardly surprising that several RPG creators have since vowed to create "the next gold box series." After all, what company wouldn't want to defer the sizeable cost of creating a new engine, and to consistently release profitable games using the same, proven technology?

But it'll never happen again.

Gamers' expectations have risen to the point where it's impossible to have another successful series that recycles the same technology. Recent RPGs that reused their predecessors' engines have garnered unenthusiastic receptions. Although FALLOUT 2 was considered by many gamers to feature gameplay that was as good as that in the original, many reviewers were disappointed that the engine was virtually unchanged.

But that doesn't compare to the hostile reception that MIGHT AND MAGIC VII received in Internet newsgroups after using the same graphically-dated MMVI engine. And yet, New World Computing decided to risk an even harsher reaction by opting to reuse the engine, yet again, for MIGHT AND MAGIC VIII. That decision is largely responsible for the game generating only slightly more anticipatory buzz than a Pauly Shore summer-comeback flick.

Unfortunately, RPGs are particularly susceptible to being encumbered by prehistoric technology. While many action games can be quickly assembled as soon as the graphics engine is complete, that engine is only the preliminary foundation for an RPG. RPGs require a more expansive gaming world, with systems for character development, inventory management, and NPC interaction; there are often dozens—if not hundreds—of unique items, weapons, spells, and characters. Even if an RPG's engine is initially impressive, by the time all the mandatory features have been built in, the engine will likely look stale compared to those in the latest shooters.

So what should RPG developers do? Ideally, they would have the financial backing and skill to develop an engine that suits their unique needs. Unfortunately, the costs are formidable, and developers risk running into an ULTIMA IX-like problem of spending a ton of money on an engine that looks great but doesn't work well, reducing the likelihood of recouping on the investment.

RPG developers have resorted to licensing established engines, especially since 3D engines have become a commercial necessity. Recently, both New World Computing and Interplay announced that they would be making RPGs based on Monolith's Lithtech engine. But it remains to be seen if an engine developed primarily for action games can be effectively transformed into a compelling RPG.

The advantages of acquiring a proven engine may be offset by the requirement to adapt someone else's technology to fit your game's design. When Valve licensed the QUAKE II engine, the developers of HALF-LIFE reportedly had to modify over 70% of the code, even though they were creating an *action* game. Ion Storm's RPGs based upon the QUAKE II engine (ANACHRONOX) and the UNREAL engine (DEUS EX) are still not available in spite of their prolonged development, even though they started with established 3D engines.

SYSTEM SHOCK 2—which used a modified version of the THIEF engine—is the only RPG released that uses a licensed engine, and it's a largely action-oriented game itself. Its gaming world is also indicative of another limitation of most current 3D engines: They are incapable of depicting expansive environments. Even though the MIGHT AND MAGIC VI engine is dated, it permits dozens of enemies to be on-screen at once, and can render wide-open outdoor environments. Licensed 3D engines may help create more beautiful gaming worlds, but those worlds will seem smaller and less populated.

We're in a strange interim period in computer gaming, when spiffy 3D graphics have become necessary for commercial success, and yet 3D-technology limitations are imposing restraints on design and gameplay, especially for RPGs. While RPG developers are understandably struggling with competing demands, genre fans are left waiting for a single product to finally get it all right.

It's enough to make you nostalgic for a gold box.

Desslock's Mix

1. NOX
2. Discovering the annoying puzzle-based mission design of Bungie's otherwise excellent MYTH.
3. Lugosi's Dracula and Karloff's Mummy and Frankenstein on DVD.
4. Oscar Nomination Blues (The Cider House Rules? Gah. The overrated American Beauty is SO going to win...)
5. MIGHT AND MAGIC VIII beta



THE LITTLE ENGINE THAT COULD Will these two beloved series get the Lithtech treatment? Apparently Interplay has other plans, but the next MIGHT AND MAGIC game will definitely use the licensed engine.

Who dares ignore the elves? For comments from the creators of DEUS EX, FALLOUT, and SYSTEM SHOCK 2 on this column's topic, as well as daily RPG news updates, check out Desslock's RPG News at desslock.gamespot.com.

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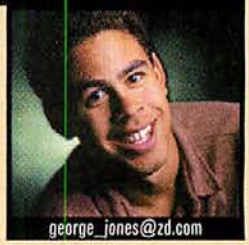
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Inside SPORTS

BY GEORGE JONES

The Great American Pastime?



george_jones@zd.com

Some Frightening Numbers in the PC Sports Game Business

Stadium sports get the hard squeeze on the PC platform, where hunting, golf, and fishing games accounted for close to 70% of total PC sports-game revenue for 1999. Inside Gaming is almost afraid to publish these numbers—we're afraid that sports game companies will see them and get out of the game entirely.

Source: PC Data, Inc., Reston, VA (703) 435-1025

Sport	Unit share	% of total $$
Hunting	43.1%	38.7%
Golf	15.3%	19.8%
Football	7.2%	9.1%
Fishing	9.5%	7.7%
Baseball	5.4%	5.8%
Basketball	3.7%	4.2%
Hockey	3.1%	4.4%
Pool	2.7%	2.0%
Soccer	1.3%	1.6%
Wrestling	1.9%	1.5%
Rodeo	1.2%	1.2%
Bowling	1.9%	1.1%
Winter Sports	0.2%	0.2%
Skiing	0.2%	0.1%
Boxing	0.1%	0.1%
Other Sports	2.8%	2.4%

George's Mix

1. *THE SIMS*
2. Turn of the Century *by Kurt Anderson*
3. *HIGH HEAT 2001*
4. *Programming my own personal radio station at* www.launch.com
5. Darwin's Radio *by Greg Bear*

CGWHHBL Crowns First-Ever Champion

The fantasy baseball saga that began almost a year ago ended with a huge upset, a four-game sweep, and the crowning of the first ever champion of the CGWHHBL: the *Computer Gaming World* HIGH HEAT Baseball League. After more than 700 games played and simmed, the now-legendary league opened the playoffs with Chris Lombardi's miracle Angels pitted against Robert Coffey's Yankees, and George Jones' Red Sox matched against Dave Salvator's Indians.

In the first round, the mighty Red Sox machine handled the Indians 3-1 in four closely-contested games, while the upstart Angels—who weren't given a chance against the Yanks—pulled off the upset of the century by shocking a Yankees team that thousands of fans considered to be unstoppable.

In the division finals, however, Jones' Boston squad pulled off a four-game sweep of Lombardi's Angels. Although three of the four games were tightly contested, the Sox proved to have too much power for Anaheim's beleaguered pitching staff, winning each of the last three games with critical, come-from-behind home runs.

Rumors that Jones was allowed to win the title because he is "our boss" were quickly squelched by league publicists, who are eager to begin promoting the sophomore season of the CGWHHBL.

Diamond Legends Online

The one problem with the current batch of PC baseball titles (see our preview on page TK) is that they don't let us play with classic players. We can't draft a team with Babe Ruth, Johnny Bench, or Sandy Koufax on it. **Foxsports.com** is partially fixing this with DIAMOND LEGENDS, their new online fantasy-baseball sim.

DIAMOND LEGENDS allows you to draft from a huge roster of baseball legends and perform the usual range of fantasy league management—setting up starting lineups, pitching rotations, and batting orders. You can also try to create some home-field advantage by "drafting" one of over 65 home ballparks, including old-school stadiums such as the Polo Grounds.

One big difference in this fantasy league is that DIAMOND LEGENDS will actually simulate each game on the schedule. This means that would-be Earl Weavers can specify all sorts of aggression levels for their teams, from how soon their relievers will enter games to how often a team will hit-and-run. You can also specify individual tendencies for certain players; a Ty Cobb can be told to be more aggressive on the base paths than your overall team setting, or certain pitchers can be made more conservative, depending on who's at bat.

The only drawback in our minds is that in order to join a league, you have to pay $50. Plus, you get charged $1 on any day you make any sort of transaction. But for some of us, that's a small price to pay to be able to engage in the ultimate fantasy league.

Check it out at **fox.diamondlegends.com**.

Inside Sports Solution Department



In NHL 2000, when the score of the game is being displayed in the upper left-hand corner, occasionally the name of one or both of the teams turns red, along with the score. I can't figure out what this means and have been unable to find the answer on the Net.

—Steven Go

Steven, we asked Dave Warfield, the Producer of NHL 2000. Here's his answer:

The team names turning red in the score clock are indicators that the teams are frustrated and/or angry, and someone may be dropping the gloves soon. This would be a good time to get your enforcer on the ice.



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Inside SIMULATIONS & SPACE

BY GORDON BERG



grognard@concentric.net

The Joy of Multiplayer

Since this edition of *CGW* details the latest offerings in WW II online aviation, I thought it would be fitting for this month's column to touch on multiplay as well. Of course, I realize that most of you have never known anything but the solo flight. Simply compare the relatively-high sales figures for popular flight sims with the relatively-low number of you actually found flying and fighting online, and you'll see what I mean. (And such a comparison is nothing new, really—the same point has long been made regarding other genres that prominently feature multiplayer gaming.)

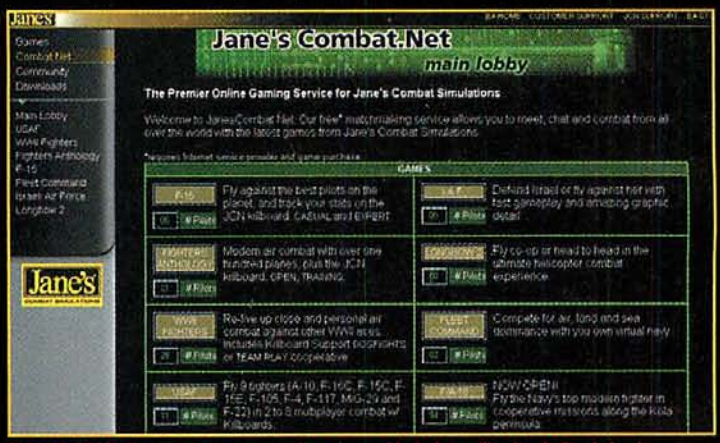
Gordon Says Get Online or Get Lost

Things are changing, though. Even if your reclusive ways have kept you from shooting at a live opponent so far, your choice of AI-controlled computer opponents will dwindle in the years to come. *[Insert favorite "flight-sims are dead" arguments here, followed by standard "all genres are cyclical" retort.]*

Like it or not, more and more multiplayer sims are slated for our immediate future. For example, a prominent sim developer had plans with more than one publisher to do various sequel projects and follow-ups related to the kinds of sims that please the flight-sim community at large. He ultimately saw all of his contracts cancelled. It turns out that the only way he could get funding for any kind of venture was if it was based on a massively-multiplayer model. As he once told me, "Every publisher and investor is willing to spend a lot of money on anything online, no matter what. So while a 'packaged flight sim' is considered very 'high risk' and no one is willing to spend a dime on it, they are more than willing to throw even more money at an 'online flight sim,' just *because* it's online. It's really screwed up."

Consequently, there will soon be at least seven different WW II online-only sims competing for your dollar. Glass half-full drinkers are now thinking, "Having so many choices can only benefit the consumer," while those of the half-empty persuasion ponder, "Great. These multiplayer WW II sims will cannibalize each other, just like all those boxed retail versions of the WW II European theater a year and a half ago."

Personally, I wouldn't necessarily mind an all-multiplayer future if it turns out that way. I spend more time flying sims online than offline, for one very simple reason: the social factor. In-game voice chat utilities like Roger Wilco have forever changed my online experiences, and the next version of DirectX is going to incorporate the similar function of Battlefield Communicator for free. So if multiplayer-only ends up being the only way I can fly a next-generation sim, so be it.



FLIGHT RISK Plunge into the scary online sim world at places like Jane's Combat.net.

If you've never given online flying a chance, you're really missing out. Therefore, your mission this month is to get your butt up into the virtual air and to engage, or cooperatively fly with, another human. Take baby steps first. Try your favorite offline sim online for a change, such as EAW via Microsoft's **Zone.com**, or USAF over at Jane's Combat.net (**www.janes.ea.com**). Then find a pay service that sports a huge multiplayer arena and look for a free trial membership. (I think these large games are the most fun, so no excuses!) Try out one of the real-time voice utilities if you can. Then, report back to me with your experiences. Was it a positive encounter, or did it royally suck? Easy to get up-and-flying, or a major pain in the ass? If enough of you write in, maybe a trend can be spotted and we can "discuss." Otherwise, I'll just end up forging the letters myself, and you don't want that on your conscience.

Gordon's Mix

1. *All of the online WW II sims*
2. *FIGHTER SQUADRON: SCREAMIN DEMONS OVER EUROPE (w/Plane Pack 5.3)*
3. *RED BARON 3D (w/Beery's latest effort)*
4. *NOX*
5. *DVD rentals from Netflix.com*

When not engaged in aerial maneuvers, Gordon Berg works as a network administrator for a non-profit social services organization.

You can have my Thrustmaster when you pry it from my cold, dead fingers...

When it comes to joysticks, everyone's got a favorite. Getting someone to switch over to a new brand is tantamount to asking them to change their religion, politics, or operating system. Personally, I've always been a CH boy myself, but I sympathize with the Thrustmaster faithful. Needless to say, it didn't go over too well when the TM high-end line of joysticks was discontinued, thus ensuring no more commercially available F-22 Pros, FLCS sticks, or the ever-popular TQS throttles. (Indeed, high-end Thrustmaster HOTAS gear has become quite the hot ticket on the auction sites. Contributing editor Loyd Case sold a set for $400!) So, in this day and age of digital USB connections, what's a poor Thrustmaster (er, now Guillemot) user to do with their aging analog sticks? Glad you asked. Head over to Bob Church's site, **www.stickworks.com** (of CTFJ utility fame), and read up on the SWF22 Digital Upgrade Kit. Essentially, you install a new chip into your gear that allows for digital-mode operation under Windows, improved stability, and increased functionality.





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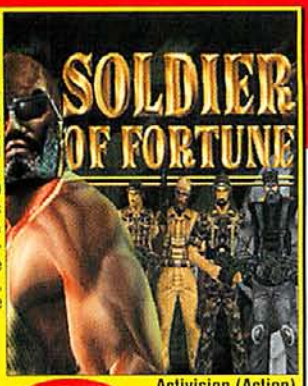
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Eidos (Action) Release: 4/00 PC CD **$32.95**

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Microprose (Simulation) Release: 4/00 PC CD **$38.99**

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Activision (Shooter) Release: 3/00 PSX **$39.95**

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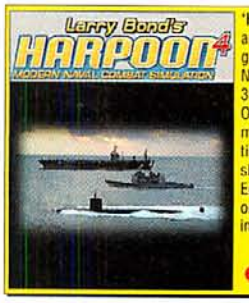
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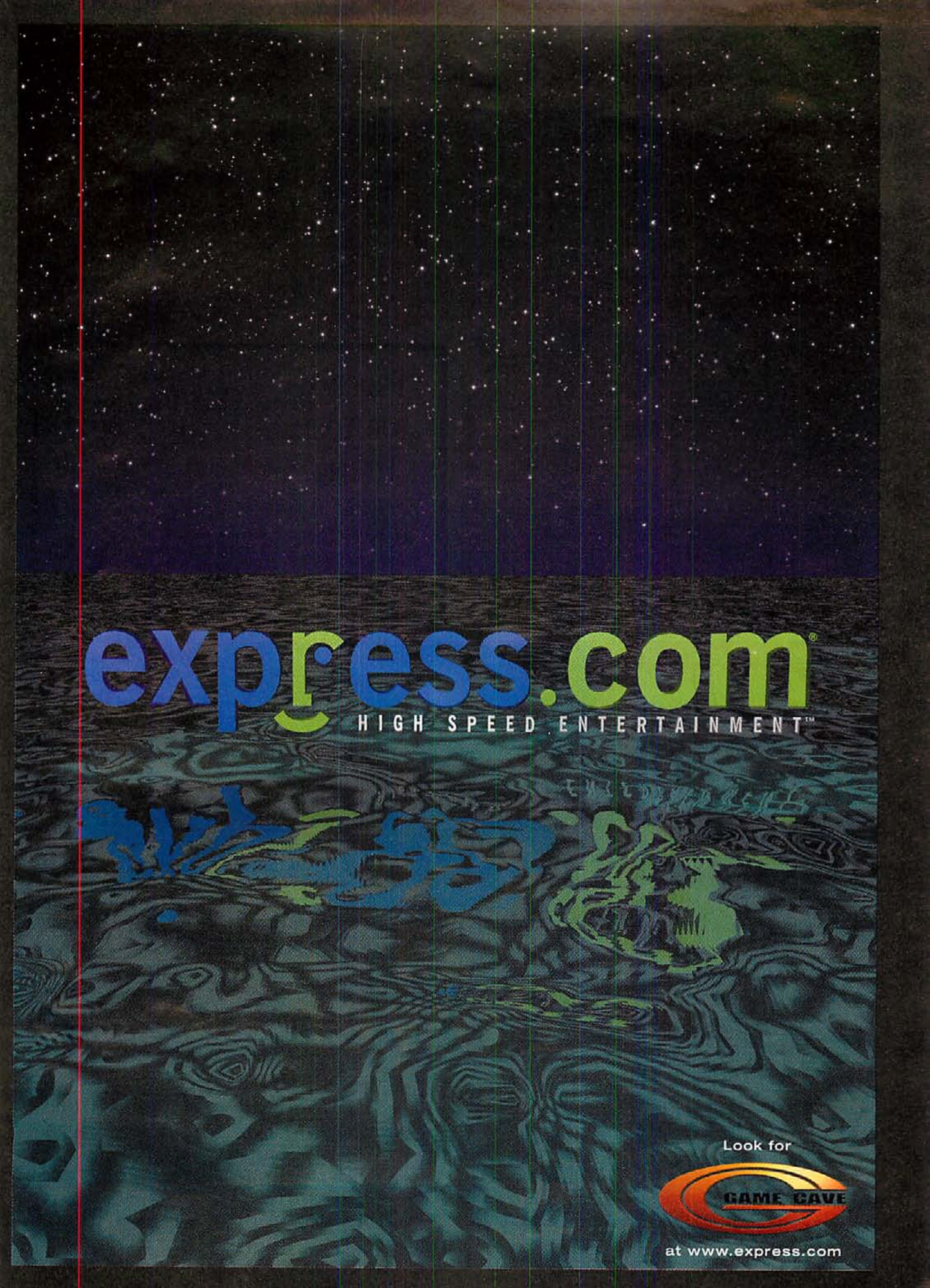
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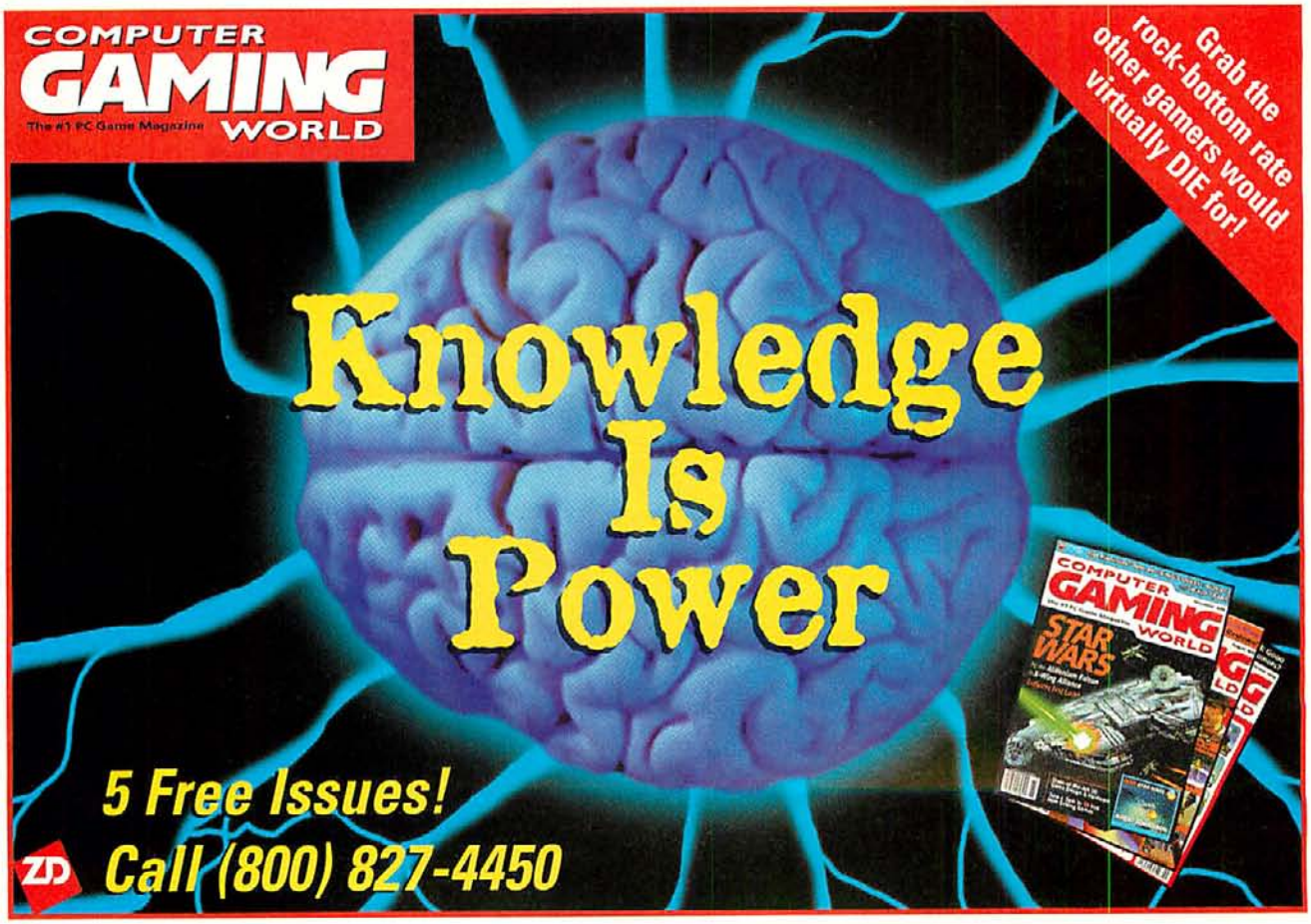
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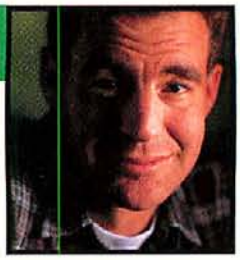
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by Jeff Green



My Job Does Not Suck

Or, I'm Sorry This Column Is Late Again and Please Don't Fire Me

I am not a cranky guy. Really. I enjoy life, when not sober, and I like my job a lot—especially on Mondays when George brings donuts. But when I look back on what I've written in this magazine lately, both on this page and in various reviews, I see nothing but whining and complaining—broken up by the occasional bit of narcissism and self-congratulation.

Such crankiness might be understandable if I were working for, say, *Proctology Today* magazine, or *Fungus World*. But dangit, these are computer games—this is supposed to be fun. Of course, when you look at what I've had to write about, my bad mood becomes much more understandable.

The last three games on my plate have been ULTIMA IX, CRUSADERS OF MIGHT AND MAGIC, and INTERSTATE 82—a veritable Larry, Curly, and Moe of computer gaming incompetence. One more game as bad as these, and I might have reapplied for my previous job testing modems for the Mac. Or the job before that, dancing naked to cowboy music.

So I have decided to change course this month. To fight back, as it were, and accentuate the positive. To remind myself how good I have it here. What I present to you this month, for your sake and mine, is a list of all the cool things about working at *Computer Gaming World*. Those of you who have always suspected that this job is ridiculously easy and fun—here's where I come clean. I know that in the past I've whined about how hard it is, how much pressure is on us all the time, how little we get paid. But, honestly, that was just a cheap ploy to elicit sympathy email from attractive women. In truth, I love my job. Here's a few reasons why.

Free games.

Big surprise, huh? Yeah, this will never get old. I've been here for over three years, and I still get as giggly as a little girl when the new pile of games arrives. True, I'm *always* as giggly as a little girl, and sometimes I like to dress up and call myself "Princess Sissypants," but that's not really any of your business, is it?

No need for discipline, maturity, or self-control.

Imagine recess at nursery school. Then imagine all the kids on five espressos each. Add to that a roomful of games and no adult supervision. This is *Lord of the Flies*, with paychecks.

A chance to mingle with gaming gods.

Not to brag or anything, but I'm on a first-name basis with some of the greatest game designers on the planet: Sid, John, Will, Derek, Lord—the list goes on and on. Someday I'd like to meet those people for real, but until that day, I continue to have the most amazing personal conversations with their lifesize cardboard cutouts in my basement. Now, if only my mom would stop interrupting me!

A chance to watch Scooter grow up.

Go look at this guy's picture in the Inside Gaming section. What is he, 12 years old? Does any other magazine have an editor on staff with a milky bottle? Seriously, the chance to help mold and shape Scooter makes me understand how Dr. Frankenstein must have felt. By the time we're done with him—no "dating" or "going outside" or "having a life" for Scooter!—my fellow editors and I will have transformed this once-promising young man into something we can be proud of: the world's ultimate gaming dork.

Scaring people in the elevator.

Our office is in the Bechtel building. I don't know who those people are or what they do, but they look serious and I don't think they play games. They wear sunglasses indoors and they don't smile. They might be working with aliens. In any case, imagine what is going on in the head of the poor sap who steps into the elevator on his way to the meeting in Block 7G, only to be confronted by a clan of disheveled misfits, shouting things like: *"Only wussies use sniper rifles. Use the flak cannon instead—you can easily mow everyone down in seconds!"* or *"Last night Bella kept peeing in my living room! And her husband kept trying to kiss me!"*

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No perceivable line between work and play.

Let me guess, there is someone in your home who thinks you waste too much time on games. I hear you, brother. Before I worked here I was just another oppressed gamer, trying to get his daily fix while getting yelled at to do things like clean the house, pay attention to loved ones, or bathe. Now I have the built-in, socially-sanctioned excuse of having to "work." As a matter of fact, as far as my wife knows, I've been working on the HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC III review for nine months now. Please don't tell her. I'm begging you. I've worked too hard to give it up now.

Jeff would like to dedicate this month's column to one of his childhood idols, Mad *magazine's late, great Don Martin. Send email to jeff_green@zd.com.*

Computer Gaming World (ISSN 0744-6667) is published monthly by ZD Inc. 28 E. 28th Street, New York, NY 10016. Subscription rate is $19.97 for a one-year subscription (12 issues). Canada and all other countries add $16.00 for surface mail. Postmaster: Send address changes to Computer Gaming World, P.O. Box 57167, Boulder, CO 80328-7167. Canadian GST registration number is 89371 0442 RT. Canada Post International Pub's Mail Product (Canada Distribution) Sales Agreement No. 1058649. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY 10016 and additional mailing offices. Printed in the U.S.A.

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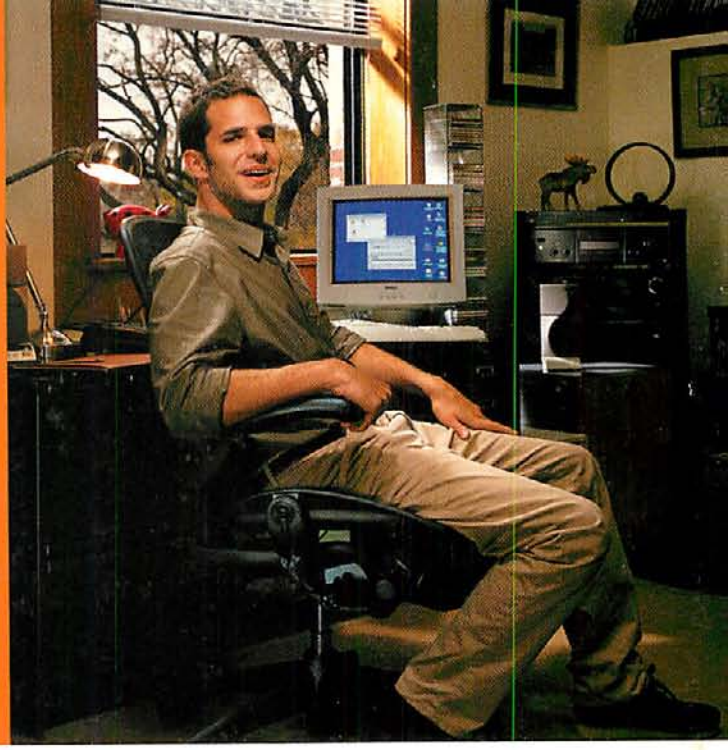
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